

## **David vs. David vs. Goliath – Which Role for Civil Society in the SADC-EU EPA Negotiations?**

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Trade negotiations have become an important part of the EU's promotion of its idea of world order based on 'global regionalism', albeit so far with little success. Instead of 'constructing regions', the EU finds its attempts contested and criticised for rather leading to breaking up regional integration. This criticism was particularly raised by civil society actors in the recent Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between the EU and the seven negotiation groupings of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries: Instead of aiming for fostering regional integration as a means to integrate ACP countries into the global economy, ongoing regional integration processes under the auspices of existing regional organisations were significantly disrupted. Instead of supporting particularly Africa's position in the emerging multi-polar world, the EPA negotiations rather tried to enhance the EU's influence against emerging powers on the continent like China or Brazil .

In multilateral forums like the WTO, civil society actors have significantly changed the course of negotiations. In the African context, the concept of civil society has been treated most critical as normative 'Western concept' with limited analytical value. However, actor groups like international NGOs, national trade unions or regional research institutes have also played a relevant role in the regional EPA negotiations, and therefore give reason to revisit the concept of civil society in its contribution to support the position of Africa governments.

The paper argues that the EPA negotiation between the EU and the SADC EPA group - Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa - serve as a prime example to scrutinise the complex network of national, regional and international civil society groups. Drawing on the findings of a threeyear research project, it will briefly theorise the concept of civil society in the context of trade negotiations and discuss its applicability in a non-Western context in the first part and provide empirical findings with a focus on South African civil society actors and their relationship with the international *Stop EPA* campaign in the EPA negotiations in the second part.