civil society organizations (CSOs) initiated national discussions on the Charter and on the question of ASEAN regionalism generally. The EPG was an independent advisory body that had more latitude in terms of consultation and in being bold and visionary, but its successor group, the current High Level Task Force on the Drafting of the ASEAN Charter, is an official body that takes its cue from ASEAN’s political leadership. How much influence present-day political exigencies have on actual provisions will determine how visionary the ASEAN Charter will be. As for how far ASEAN believes in people being at the center of the regional community depends in part on how the Charter will be ratified. Current civil society advocacy is for ratification by national referendum to ensure the socialization of the ideas in the Charter, to give citizens a direct participation in its adoption, and to make clear to them the responsibility of ASEAN States in upholding the Charter.

As it is, civil society is doing ASEAN a favor by bringing the issue of regionalism to the people, and by generating public debate on it. ASEAN would do well to accept civil society as a necessary pillar to genuine regionalism, as the Charter process is but the start of an increasing interest in ASEAN. Having people involved means that ASEAN should be prepared for greater scrutiny and demands for openness. People's participation improves governance but does not make it any less difficult. The onus of participation, which ASEAN conveniently insists should be with civil society having a unified voice, also needs to be re-examined. The advantage of civil society groups lies in their ability to represent a variety of advocacies and perspectives. It is no more possible for all civil society groups to come up with a singular response as it is for ASEAN Governments to have the exact same position on issues every time. It is equally pointless to expect civil society to compromise on basic principles of accountability and participation for fear of losing the space they are just starting to get from ASEAN. For now, the greatest challenge for civil society is to continue challenging ASEAN and reclaiming the region for a broader people’s agenda.

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Alternative Regional Strategies in Africa
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African social movements have long been accustomed to hearing constant references by their governments to the importance of African unity and
cooperation. The African Union is the most recent practical expression of this. However, in contrast to the earlier regional development modalities, as expressed in the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the Treaty of Abuja (1991), current plans for regional integration within the half dozen African Regional Economic Communities – as the ‘building blocks’ for the eventual (re)integration of the whole of Africa – are increasingly driven by neoliberal theories and programmes.

Under the pressures of International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank (WB) Structural Adjustment Programs, from the early 1980s, most African governments implemented radical trade and investment liberalization programmes within their economies – with drastic effects. However, under the joint efforts of the IMF/WB and the European Commission, from the early 1990s, such liberalization programmes were then extended to cover cross-border relations within groupings of African countries and to create ‘open regionalism’. The neoliberal transformation of the vision and plans for African regional and continental integration was carried even further in the so-called New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) drawn up by African governments, themselves, in 2002.

It is in this context that developmental, environmental and human rights NGOs, trade unions, and other social movements are increasingly coming together to challenge the current realities of ‘regional integration’ in Africa. These popular interventions are based on dense cross-border networks of civil society organizations across Africa, although most intensively in Southern Africa. This is reflected in many areas of sectoral regional cooperation, such as on common health challenges (especially HIV/AIDS) and human rights abuses, and against the privatization and liberalization programmes that are being implemented by all the governments of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). There are also significant Peoples’ Summits being organized in parallel with, as well as to challenge the annual SADC Heads of State summits. Besides these mobilizations, there is the rapidly expanding popular participation in the Southern African Social Forums taking place in a different country of the Southern African region each year.

In addition to the specific sectoral and issue-based coalitions, social movement analysts and activists are intervening directly on common regional strategies. They argue that integration must be advanced through the combination of cooperation in many spheres, such as in dealing with shared environmental crises (or ‘natural disasters’) or cross-border social crises (such as economically and politically driven population migrations). There also has to be more advanced coordination in others spheres, such as in the infrastructural sinews (roads, railways, river transports, etc.) that can facilitate cross-border trade and other relations. And there has to be strategic policy harmonization in spheres such as intra-regional – and joint external – trade and investment policies, because if these are imposed within neoliberal frameworks they will reinforce the internal unevennesses and external interventions that have far-reaching
negative implications against the alternative rebalancing aims of regional development.

Social movements also argue that developmental regionalism will entail much more than economic policies and programmes. In order to create the essential basis for development and in order to be able to grapple with the many problems within the participating countries, regional programmes have to be holistic and comprehensive. They have to embrace a multiplicity of programmes over the entire spectrum of economic and financial, social and socio-economic, labour and gender, cultural and environmental, and other spheres, including political/democratization issues, human security and human rights provisions.

Similarly, in the face of the impending global pressures – and even predicted struggles and wars – over energy and water supplies, neighbouring countries have to undertake fundamental coordination and cooperation initiatives with regard to these key resources. This will entail joint research and exploration, management and coordination, mobilization and conservation of cross-border wetlands and river systems, lakes, underground aquifers, and other water resources. These, by their very nature, are not confined by political frontiers. The rational and equitable distribution and utilization of such shared resources as water is rapidly becoming one of the essential purposes of joint programmes between neighbouring communities across borders, and between mutually-dependent countries. The same applies to the development and distribution of current and potential energy resources.

Another pressing aim and purpose of intra-regional cooperation between neighbouring countries relates to the preservation of their respective and shared natural resources more broadly. The tropical regions of the world, and the political-economic-ecological regions, such as Southern Africa, are the richest areas of biodiversity on the planet. But, as with water and energy resources, regional programmes are essential for the joint development and preservation of wildlife and fishery resources, forests and plant species, mangrove swamps, coral reefs and other oceanic resources. Some prime examples of regional natural resource protection and development are the vast ‘trans-frontier’ conservation zones that have been created between neighbouring national parks in South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe; or on an even vaster scale between Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. These are examples of the (re)unification and (re)creation of the geo-economic and ecological regions that will contribute to the incremental integration and development of the broader regions in which they are being created. However, such programmes must also protect and benefit the communities living in these areas, and this will not happen without direct engagement of the peoples concerned.

Clearly, instead of being based on the ‘trade-driven growth’ paradigm currently dominating the world, regional development strategies have to be based upon and promote sustainable and popularly-driven development and
diversification. However, under the inherited circumstances of very uneven
development within and between the countries and communities of the
SADC, such development also has to entail policies consciously designed to
encourage the de-concentration or decentralization of production systems
and the deliberate redistribution of productive assets. Such redistribution has
to be oriented towards lesser developed sub-regions and disadvantaged social
groups and sectors throughout the region. More self-sufficient and self-
sustaining productive capacities would also be promoted through comple-
mentary policies and programmes encouraging cross-border manufacturing
or processing programmes designed to draw on, coordinate and combine
their respective resources, enhance their complementarities and generate new
capacities and strengths.

Such redistributive development and diversification programmes will not be
created and implemented while the governments of the region are under the
domination of internal and international neoliberal forces. Neither will the
reorientation of such governments be possible without full democratization in
these countries. The essential shifts in national, regional and international bal-
ances of power demand the deepening strategic cooperation and action of
national, regional, inter-regional – and international-peoples alliances.

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Social Movement Strategies and Integration of Peoples

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The strategies of social movements and organizations linked to what we may
call the Latin American social left – and its ties to the social left in the USA
and Canada – have framed current regional integration processes within two
political currents, which are developing simultaneously.

The first current is endogenous and is related to the history of the movement
itself, its origins in the resistance to so-called free trade, and the fact that, in its
discourse, it had constructed its own identity based on criticism of Free Trade
Agreements (FTAs) and in advocating what was called the ‘other possible
America’. The movement had likewise defined itself as being in opposition to the
‘agenda of large corporations’, in favour of a ‘people’s agenda’, and in its most
recent articulation as an ‘integration of peoples’. This grassroots questioning by
the movement itself – which was often contested in the media, especially regard-
ing the alternatives proposed to ‘free trade’ had the effect of pressuring the