

## Making Political Parties Relevant in the Democratization Process in Tanzania

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### **Abstract**

*This article posits that it is absurd to suggest that political parties are no longer indispensable to modern democracies. It starts by rebutting the four main propositions that support the assertion that political parties are no longer indispensable for the consolidation and sustenance of democracy. The article proposes that rather than being irrelevant to the democratization process, political parties in countries undergoing a political transition face specific challenges. Taking Tanzanian political parties as a case in point, the article outlines the challenges facing political parties to include the need to play an effective role in the oversight of the electoral process; providing space for vulnerable groups to participate in politics; incorporating civil society organizations in the democratization process; ensuring a free media; institutionalizing good governance and making themselves relevant by ensuring that the substantive dimensions of democracy are as important as its procedural ones.*

### **Introduction**

Democracy as a form of government preceded political parties as exemplified by the Greek City States. In modern democratic states political parties are an integral part of the democratic process. Today, in all countries in the world, there is no alternative to political parties in the establishment of democracy. No form of nonparty representation has ever produced democratic government. Thus, we are faced with a world of democracies based on parties (Mapanje, 1981). It is noted further that in contemporary states it is difficult to imagine politics without parties. Indeed, in only two kinds of states today are parties absent. First, there are a few small, traditional

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societies, especially in the Gulf, that are still ruled by the families who were dominant in the region long before the outside world recognized them as independent states. Then there are those regimes in which parties and party activities have been banned. These regimes are either run by the military or by authoritarian rulers who have the support of the military (Ware, 1996). As a matter of fact, the condition of parties is the best evidence of the nature of any regime. And the most important distinction between democracy and dictatorship can be made in terms of party politics. The parties are not mere appendages to modern government; they are at the centre of it and can play a determinative and creative role in it (Schattschneider, 1965 and 1942).

The democratization of the political landscape in Africa has been partly due to the participation of political parties. Parties have played important roles in mobilizing citizens, aggregating interests, recruiting candidates, developing policy proposals and coordinating government. Further, they have conducted election campaigns, structured electoral choices, linked leaders and activists and organized legislators (Moyo, 2007). Moyo contends that these roles are essential to the establishment and maintenance of stable and democratic societies. He points out that when political parties fail to perform these functions, the very survival of democratic political systems is threatened. There are, on the other hand, those who argue that political parties and their functions are no longer what they used to be. That they have changed substantially and these changes, it is argued, have resulted in the weakening of connections between states and their citizens. The thrust of the argument is that parties no longer clearly and decisively structure electoral choices, passionately and persistently command citizen attachments, form governments with as much discipline and distinctiveness, or aggregate interests as widely and explicitly as they once did. Therefore, it is concluded that political parties are becoming less and less able to perform these core functions. In short, they are no longer indispensable for the consolidation and performance of democracy (Schmitter, 2001).

There are four seemingly strong factors used by proponents of the argument that political parties are no longer indispensable for the consolidation and sustenance of democracy. First, electronic communication shortens the distance between voters and political candidates, who can now appeal to their constituents directly via electronic mass media and the internet. Therefore, there is no need for political parties to play the role of intermediaries. Secondly, the flourishing of civil society and various interest groups makes political parties less important in politics. All interests, views

or ideologies can be represented by interest groups. Thirdly, the convergence of political parties in policies and ideologies makes inter-party competition far less important. In modern democracies, the difference between political parties regarding ideologies and political programs tend to decrease. The convergence of policies of the British Labour Party and Conservative Party is taken as a good example. This convergence of ideologies leads to political parties becoming less differentiated than before. As a result, competition between parties becomes not only unnecessary but also a waste of resources and time. Lastly, it is posited that modern voters have become disgusted by political parties and career politicians and view them as corrupt obstacles to reform and policy innovation (Greider, 1992; White, 1992; Schlesinger, 1984; Polsby, 1980).

Strong as these propositions may appear, a political party, in the opinion of many, is a network organized and steered by politically ambitious people who share similar ideologies and try to enlist people interested in politics in order to extend their influence and strengthen their position to compete for public position. Raymond Suttner (2004) refers to political parties as machines organized to win elections and wield government power. Other contemporary scholars (Basedau and Erdmann, 2007; Norris, 2004; Salih, 2005; Cilliers, 2004 and 2002) see political parties not only as essential for consolidating and sustaining democracy but also for contributing to development and security. Given their ubiquitous nature, political parties are unavoidable in the political landscape. In Suttner's view, political parties are the major organizing vehicles of modern politics. It is the basic argument of this article that this characterization of political parties indicates that they are indispensable for modern democracies, even in the age of electronic communication. We can therefore rebut the arguments suggesting political parties are no longer indispensable for the consolidation and sustenance of democracy with the following propositions.

First, it is true that electronic communication provides individual voters with better access to information and gives ambitious politicians more opportunities to directly appeal to voters. Electronic communication also allows candidates to engage in voter mobilization as well as ideology and policy articulation, two major functions of political parties. But still political parties cannot be replaced. Candidates need local party networks, which are more effective than any individual for influencing and mobilizing voters. Electronic communication is passive and its effectiveness limited. Secondly, civil society and various interest groups do not replace, but only supplement,

political parties in the political process. Although overlapping functions do exist between political parties and CSOs, political parties are more power and action oriented, and have more comprehensive programs with regard to a wide range of social, political, economic and cultural issues. CSOs and many pressure groups usually target certain sections of society and address specific issues. Thirdly, the convergence of political parties in policies and ideologies should be seen as a challenge to political parties and not taken as the end of party politics. After all, parties do not adopt the same position on every issue and voters in this regard act like customers who choose among many brands of an item, though there is no big difference among the brands. Lastly, the proposition that people have become disenchanted by corruption and lack of reforms is not a good reason to do away with political parties. In fact this is the very essence of the need to reform parties and devise concrete, practical and sustainable strategies to combat corruption in politics.

In this article, I argue that political parties are indispensable for modern democracies in general, and Tanzania in particular, by discussing four main issues. First, I look at the nature and functions of political parties and how they provide a link between state and society. Secondly, I posit that political parties have to contend with not only the quest to rule but also they perform other duties. It is an open secret that political parties' functions can now be performed by, among others, CSOs and the media. Thirdly, I argue that the fact that other institutions perform the functions political parties are expected to perform is enough reason to strengthen them in order to promote democracy. Political parties need support from both the government and civil society. External institutions have a role to play in strengthening political parties in ways that contribute to consolidating democracy. Lastly, I outline some challenges that political parties in Tanzania face that are key in the development of the country and the consolidation of democracy.

### **Political Parties, the State and Society**

There are certain facts about political parties that we can generally state are universal. First, political parties are essentially organizations formed to campaign and seek political power. Secondly, for political parties to capture and exercise political power, they have to perform certain functions including, but not limited to, the integration and mobilization of citizens, articulation and aggregation of citizens interests, formulation of public policy, recruitment of political leaders and organization of parliament and government (Salih, 2005; Moyo, 2006; Bartolini and Mair, 2001). Thirdly, political parties are the major means of organizing in modern politics. They

have not only the potential but also capacity to be the building blocks of democracy, useful tools for peace building and development in general. Political parties can also be a source of instability, repression and conflict if the political space is not carefully crafted to offer a level playing field. It is obvious that political parties play an important role not only in consolidating but also perpetuating democracy.

A fourth fact that can be said about political parties is that they link citizens with their governments, different interest groups and the various institutions of the state. During elections parties mobilize citizens, articulate citizens' interests and propose public policy through their election manifestos. After elections the successful party or coalition of parties forms a government. In this process parties facilitate the social contract between the government and citizens. In a multiparty setting, parliament consists of the ruling party (or parties in a coalition) and the opposition. Parliament (or the legislature) is one of the three branches of government. Its basic functions are to legislate and check the executive, demand accountability of the government and represent the people in the highest law making body.

Political parties are critical in creating political stability, building democratic institutions, holding free and fair elections, encouraging popular participation, demanding an equitable distribution of national resources and entrenching good governance systems. When political parties form governments after elections, they play one important role in politics and that is building and maintaining peace, harmony and stability in the political system. Stability in any political set up is essential for development and there cannot be peace when political parties are squabbling (Maliyamkono, 2004). With a stable political environment, institutions of governance perform well and parties spearhead this process. Parliament, for example, enacts laws, passes a national budget and oversees government functions. Resource allocation through the budgeting process ensures an equitable distribution among sectors, regions, districts and groups in society. Observance of rule of law and human rights, as required by constitutional and legal provisions, is facilitated by parties in parliament and guarantees equality, equity and social justice. Political parties also play a key role in facilitating the participation of citizens in politics as they organize the electoral lists of candidates, mobilize people to take part in the electoral process, and involve different groups within the parties. Parties are critical in involving vulnerable groups (women, youth, disabled) in the political process (Zelege, 2005).

Good governance requires, among other things, that governments must be accountable to the people. In both vertical and horizontal accountability political parties, especially those represented in parliament, play a key role. Vertical accountability involves the government being answerable for its actions, or inactions, to the people. By mobilizing people and articulating their interests, political parties sensitize citizens and the latter demand their rights and call upon the government to fulfil its obligations. An informed citizenry will keep the government on its toes and political parties facilitate this process. Horizontal accountability involves the three branches of government – the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. They account to each other and this is called checks and balances. They check each other by separating the three basic functions of government: enacting laws, adjudication and administration or implementation of public policy and decisions. They also balance the powers held by each branch through control mechanisms established by law. Parliament can form probe committees to review executive decisions; the courts, upon submission of requests by either an individual or group of people, can review any law or executive decisions. Courts can declare any law unconstitutional if it is satisfied that the particular law contradicts the constitution.

It is an acknowledged fact that one of the most important contributions to democratic practice has been the development of a system of checks and balances. It is a system founded on the belief that government is best when its potential for abuse is curbed and when it is held as close to the people as possible. As a general term, checks and balances have two meanings: federalism and separation of powers. Federalism is the division of government between the national, state or provincial, and local levels. The United States is a good example of federalism. In its second sense, checks and balances refer to separation of powers to ensure that political power would not be concentrated within a single branch of the national government.

There is no doubt therefore that political parties provide a strong link between the state and society. They are like a conveyor belt facilitating the movement of demands from society to the state and the outputs of policy deliberations and decisions from the state to society. In that regard it is logical to expect political parties to perform other functions than winning and exercising political power. The quest to rule is not the only objective of political parties. In the next section I argue that political parties have a special role to play with respect to peace, security and development as preconditions for consolidating and sustaining democracy.

### **Political Parties and Peace, Security and Development**

I argued in the preceding section that the functions of political parties make them ideal vehicles for linking citizens and the state. In the same vein we can find another link between peace, security and development and the functions of political parties. Many observers of the African political process have emphatically pointed out that for development to take place there should be some level of political stability, an end to violent conflicts and a commitment to democratic principles and practices. The African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance calls for a culture of good governance. It states in no uncertain terms that good governance can only be achieved through the institutionalization of transparency, accountability and participatory democracy. Good governance, particularly rule of law, is one of the pillars of peace and stability. Rule of law presupposes justice and where there is justice the potential for peace is higher. Without peace, stability and justice; development will be hard to achieve.

One way for political parties to ensure political stability is to develop a culture of political tolerance. There must be tolerance among parties and within parties, between parties and other institutions involved in the electoral process. One of the sources of political instability in Africa, Tanzania included, is mismanagement of elections and refusal to accept election results. Many multiparty elections have been held in Africa including three in Tanzania and the results of some elections have been hotly disputed. The result has been chaos, violence, deaths and scores of people forced to flee and become refugees in neighbouring countries. Disputed elections results that have led to violence have taken place in Angola, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, DRC, Ivory Coast, Tanzania (especially the 2000 elections in Zanzibar) and Zimbabwe. In Angola, for example, multiparty elections were held in 1992 after 17 years of civil war. The MPLA government defeated UNITA in free and fair elections, yet UNITA's response was not to form a loyal opposition, but instead to return to the bush and carry on its insurgency (Thomson, 2004).

Political parties on both sides of the divide (ruling and opposition) must learn to accept election results. If election results are disputed, and there are genuine reasons to dispute the election results, the ruling party must accept responsibility for the ensuing chaos. Experience has shown that in most cases it is the aggrieved party or coalition of parties that is called upon to compromise. The case of Burundi (Agyeman, 2000) illustrates this point very

well. In Burundi, a country where the Hutu make up 75% of the population, the Hutu majority elected a Hutu president in April 1993 after the adoption of multiparty politics. Five months later, he was killed by Tutsi paratroopers. In an attendant wave of slaughter, some 50,000 people were killed. In January 1994, a replacement, again a president from Hutu group, was killed in a plane crash along with a fellow Hutu president of Rwanda. In April 1994, the National Assembly again elected a Hutu as an interim president. On 24 July 1996, he was overthrown and a Tutsi president was installed. In Burundi sharing power is still difficult partly because parties are not strong enough to transcend ethnic loyalties.

A healthy democracy needs understandable rules and a level playing field. The assumption is that competitive elections promote political legitimacy and mobilize groups for development purposes. Democratization has wider appeals, especially when linked to such elements as political representation, consensus, accountability, transparency and legitimacy. Political representation (through parties) underlines the expression of people's wishes. To gain general acceptance, political organizations (including parties) design programs (starting with election manifestos) that are relevant to the needs of the people. One basic need of the people is to reduce poverty, which is a serious challenge to security. Pervasive poverty is a silent threat to security. This can be seen in the definition of human security advanced by many commentators, among them the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In its 1994 Human Development Report, UNDP defines human security as: "It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life - whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" (UNDP, 1994: 23). It has also been stated (Mutesa and Nchito, 2005) that an effective democratic state, that promotes and protects the welfare of its people, is a precondition for strengthening the legitimacy, stability, and security of its own existence. Seen from this perspective, security of the state is not an end in itself, but a means of securing security for its people.

Poverty negates human security. Poverty like human security is a multidimensional social phenomenon. Poverty not only entails lacking what is necessary for material well-being, it also has important psychological dimensions. In that regard poor people lack voice, power and independence and are unable to participate effectively in community life. Political parties play an important role in giving the people voice through their facilitation of



the process of institutionalizing participation. Participation is defined as a process through which stakeholders shape and share control over development initiatives (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2001). And institutionalized participation is defined as a rights-based, structurally integrated, and legitimized process through which capable stakeholders shape and share control over development initiatives. Democracies make several assumptions about human nature. One is that, given the chance, people are generally capable of governing themselves in a manner that is fair and free. Another is that any society comprises a great diversity of interests and individuals deserve to have their voices heard and their views respected. As a result, one thing is true of all democracies: they are participatory. Political parties provide one such avenue for political participation

It is important to restate that democracy is in many ways nothing more than a set of rules for managing conflict. Conflicts must be managed within certain limits and result in compromises, consensus, or other agreements that all sides accept as legitimate. A healthy democracy depends in a large part on the development of a democratic civic culture. Culture in this sense does not refer to art, literature or music but to the behaviours, practices, and norms that define the ability of a people to govern themselves. The civic culture of a democratic society is shaped by the freely chosen activities of individuals and groups. And political culture embodies attitudes, values and behaviours - all of which matter for state accountability because they influence what citizens expect of the state (Fox, 2000). Citizens in a free society pursue their interests, exercise their rights, and take responsibility for their own lives. These actions must be taken in an environment in which everybody feels safe. Safety comes with security and knowledge about ones rights and obligations. In this regard people must be educated about their rights and obligations. It must be emphasized that people may be born with an appetite for freedom, but they are not born with knowledge about the social and political arrangements that make freedom possible over time for themselves and their children. Such things must be acquired. They must be learned. Political parties play an important role in this respect.

Political parties recruit, nominate, and campaign to elect public officials; draw up policy programs for the government if they are in the majority; offer criticisms and alternative policies if they are in opposition; mobilize support for common policies among different interest groups; educate the public national issues; and provide structure and rules for the society's political debate. One more important fact to bear in mind is that in a democracy

government is only one element coexisting in a social fabric of many and varied institutions, political parties, organizations, and associations. This diversity is called pluralism, and it assumes that many organized groups and institutions in a democratic society do not depend upon government for their existence, legitimacy, or authority. These groups, including political parties, serve a mediating role between individuals and the complex social and governmental institutions of which they are a part, filling roles not given to the government and offering individuals opportunities to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. These groups and especially political parties represent the interests of their members in a variety of ways - by supporting candidates for public office, debating issues, and trying to influence policy decisions. All these can only happen in an environment of peace, security and where people are not suffering from abject poverty.

In connection with the above it is important to refer to Lipset's hypothesis that the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy (Lipset, 1959). Lipset also emphasized education as a necessary condition for inaugurating democracy. Dahl (1961 and 1976) and Rustow (1970) have argued that particular social and political structures must be in place before democracy can occur. For example, Dahl's explanation of democratization expands from addressing extreme inequalities in the distribution of such key values as income, wealth, status, knowledge, and military prowess to include extreme inequalities in political resources. It has been noted also (Bollen and Jackman, 1985; Muller, 1985) that economic inequality within countries is important to the extent that it influences the distribution of power resources. An implication of a high concentration of wealth in the hands of landlords, influential families, and political elites is that the population on the whole will be deprived of the basic necessities of life, like adequate health care, education and housing. The level of socioeconomic development relates to the emergence of various groups and associations that is defined as the growth of civil society. The rise of civil society and democracy is impossible where people must constantly worry about their basic necessities of life (Abootalebi, 1998).

Equally significant is the fact that democracies rest upon the principle that governments exist to serve the people, the people do not exist to serve the government. In other words, the people are citizens of the democratic state, not its subjects. While the state protects the rights of citizens, in return, the citizens give the state their loyalty. When citizens in a democracy vote, for

example, they are exercising their right and responsibility to determine who shall rule in their name. Similarly, citizens in a democracy enjoy the right to join organizations of their choosing that are independent of government and to participate freely in the public life of their society. At the same time, citizens must accept the responsibility that such participation entails: educating themselves about the issues, demonstrating tolerance in dealing with those holding opposing views, and compromising when necessary to reach agreement. In accomplishing these tasks political parties are essential vehicles that bring the interests of their members and supporters together to formulate the concrete demands presented in their election manifestos. Those parties that win elections then translate these demands into policy decisions to serve the people. A satisfied populace is a prerequisite for peace and security - development cannot take place in a violent atmosphere.

Political parties have a role to play in a country's economic development. Although democracy implies no specific doctrine of economics, political parties on the left, while generally social democratic in orientation, recognize that the free market, acting in accordance with the principles of supply and demand, is the primary engine of economic growth and prosperity. Similarly, centre-right parties, while generally opposed to government's responsibility or ownership of production, have accepted the government's responsibility for regulating certain aspects of the economy: providing unemployment benefits, medical care, and other benefits of the modern welfare state; and using tax policy to encourage economic development. As a result, modern democracies tend to have economies that, while diverse in the details, share fundamental features. And one inescapable fact is that in democracies, the winning party (or parties) will influence the economic policies of the government. The ruling party (or parties) as well as the opposition have a responsibility to ensure peace, security and stability for economic development in all its aspects to take place in society.

### **Relevance of Political Parties to the Democratization Process**

This section starts by outlining challenges that political parties face in Tanzania that are key to the development of the country and the consolidation of democracy. By tackling these challenges, the relevance as well as responsibilities of political parties will be spelt out. I will discuss the following (i) instituting effective oversight of the electoral process, (ii) ensuring participation of vulnerable groups in politics and decision making organs, (iii) establishing a working relationship with CSOs, (iv) creating a

conducive environment for the media to operate, and (v) institutionalizing good governance.

*Effective Oversight of the Electoral Process*

As mentioned above, Tanzania conducted three multiparty elections since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992. These elections (1995, 2000 and 2005) have been judged to have been relatively free and fair but not without complaints. The opposition parties cried foul, especially with the 2000 elections in Zanzibar. The composition and manner of appointment to the National Electoral Commission (NEC) has also been a subject of debate. The opposition claims that the NEC is not an independent electoral authority. This claim has been refuted by the NEC, although it has admitted to being plagued by administrative weaknesses (URT, 2006). But the opposition has also not been able to effectively oversee the electoral process. The result has generally been that both the ruling and opposition parties trade accusations to the effect that the playing field has not been level and fair to all.

Political parties in Tanzania can serve as important guarantors of democracy if they not only participate in elections but if they also strive to institute an effective oversight of the electoral process. Election monitoring is the key to effectively overseeing the electoral processes. Election monitoring is designed to reduce the opportunities and incentives for electoral fraud; identify and address problems with the electoral process; and legitimize a peaceful transfer of power. How can this be done? This can be done in two ways. First, political parties must deploy poll watchers on Election Day and these poll watchers must be trained properly. The training should not be limited to observing what is happening but they must also report on actions that may lead to contested results. Secondly, political parties must work together with and support nonpartisan citizens' organizations that mobilize election monitors. Parties must also make use of complaint mechanisms where they have the standing to do so.

It is important for political parties to institute a mechanism to ensure the electoral process is well managed. Given their number (currently 17) they can together manage to post poll watchers in every registration centre and every polling station on voting day. To accomplish this they do not have to seek government financial support to pay for the up-keep of the poll watchers. They need to understand and accept the challenge that such an exercise requires voluntarism. Volunteers and not necessarily paid party cadres can

do the job. In this regard all political parties, but especially those in the opposition, need to accept that the ruling party may not be agreeable to the state funding of the poll watchers. At any rate, the electoral process needs to be monitored and it is the responsibility of political parties to do so. Other organizations can be relied upon but such organizations as international observer groups only come for short periods and observe only parts of the electoral process.

#### *Political Participation of Vulnerable Groups*

Political parties may be more than relevant in the democratization process in Tanzania if they embark on special programs to include women, youth and other disadvantaged groups. A disadvantaged group is any group that has historically been excluded from fair participation in a country's political process. The implication is that when inclusion is realized, the interests advocated by women and disadvantaged groups will be fully taken into account. It has been observed (Liviga and Killian forthcoming; USAID, 1999, 1998), for example, that women have been at the forefront of democratization movements in many countries, but this involvement has not necessarily translated into increased political opportunities for women in new democracies. The inclusion of women's rights in constitutions, the setting of targets for women's representation in legislative bodies, and the establishment of links by women's advocacy organizations are evidence of change. Yet obstacles remain. For example, many women still lack the training and skills to make them more effective politically.

Available literature shows that women, for example, are constrained by structural and functional constraints that are shaped by social, economic and political relations in society. The common patterns of women's political exclusion stem from, among others, the following: political and ideological factors (political structures, institutions and discourse), socio-cultural factors (the socio-cultural and functional constraints that put a limit on women's individual and collective agency), and economic factors (Bari, 2005; Zeleke, 2005; Meena, 1997). The youth and disabled are faced with more or less the same problems. Vulnerable groups therefore need special attention from political parties for them to be engaged fully in the political process.

Political party activities to support the inclusion of women and other disadvantaged groups should include:

- Working to build direct representation of women and members of disadvantaged groups in political party organizations including decision making organs (executive committees, national conferences);
- Promoting voter education and mobilization activities targeted specifically at women and members of disadvantaged groups, in particular the youth and disabled;
- Promoting the direct participation of women and members of disadvantaged groups in the administration and oversight of elections.

*Incorporating CSOs in the Democratization Process*

The role and significance of civil society organizations cannot be overemphasized. Alex Thomson reminds us that “in living memory, African civil societies have underwritten multiparty democracy twice on the continent. First, it was associational activity, in terms of the nationalist movements, that defeated colonialism. The colonial state was dismantled and, in most cases, multiparty elections held to select who would form the first governments after liberation. Then it was civil society activity that helped bring about Africa’s ‘second liberation’ some thirty years later, with one-party states making way for multiparty democracy at the end of the twentieth century” (Thomson, 2004: 6).

Political parties in Tanzania do not have a formalized partnership with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Nonetheless, CSOs have an impact on the political scene in Tanzania. Testimony to this, according to Makaramba (2007), is the intense lobbying action taken by the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) in 1998. TAMWA, a non-profit organization of media women, in that year mobilized other non-profit organizations, including the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) and the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) to lobby and successfully persuade the National Assembly to pass a special sexual offenses law. The law, now in force, outlaws female genital mutilation and sexual harassment, and imposes a life sentence for the offense of rape. TAMWA though is not the only CSO that has successfully influenced government policies and decisions. Other CSOs have been equally successful in lobbying government and elected representatives.

Amos Mhina (2007) observed that human rights advocacy groups, especially those involved in legal matters, have a special impact on the legal and political space in Tanzania. He cites the example of The Legal and Human

Rights Centre (LHRC), which has defended the rights of pastoralists, hunters and gatherers in Arusha and Kilimanjaro regions. Other CSOs listed by Mhina include The Tanganyika Law Society (TLS), which has organized some workshops on constitutional and legal reforms and the review of democratic changes in Tanzania. The Legal Aid Committee of the Faculty of Law at the University of Dar es Salaam became prominent after a few professors took up cases for low-income people and won them. The Women's Legal Aid Centre (WLAC), TGNP and Environmental, Human Rights Care and Gender Organization (Environcare) have had a remarkable impact in their respective areas of specialization. WLAC has been assisting women and children through legal and human rights awareness, legal aid, research and publication. It is not surprising, therefore, that the role of CSOs has been recognized and Pritchett and Kaufman (1998) have suggested that the hallmark of a democratic society is the freedom of individuals to associate with like-minded individuals, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy, and petition their government. Civil society is the term that best describes the nongovernmental, not-for-profit, independent nature of organizations that allow for this type of broad citizen participation.

Meredith Weiss (2005) informs us further that CSOs have found ways to wield influence. Civil society activism has been particularly salient in bringing to the attention of the public and policy makers issues such as environmental conservation and domestic violence. Among the issue areas in which civil society activists have engaged substantially with governments are education, women's rights, civil liberties and health care - HIV/AIDS in particular. It is a fact that many civil society organizations take on controversial issues. They champion women's rights, ferret out government corruption and impunity, and spotlight business practices that are exploitative of labour and the environment. Their presence and activities help assure that government and citizens comply with the rule of law. CSOs make strong and positive contributions towards improved governance; however, their tendency to focus on a single issue, often to the exclusion of other important concerns, can negatively affect development policies. In this regard political parties are not only better placed than CSOs to arbitrate between competing interests and also to secure the public interest, but their mandate actually requires as much.

The challenge for political parties is to find the ways and means to take on the challenge to represent, coordinate and defend CSOs. This is critical in the democratization process because it is through the advocacy of civil society

that people are given a voice in the process of formulating public policy. Political parties may forge a working relationship with CSOs through educating government officials to do away with misconceptions on the real agenda of CSOs. Civil society organizations are construed by some government officials, especially at lower levels, as rivals in politics. This is true in so far as CSOs do the work the government has failed to do or get done due to the limited resources at its disposal.

#### *Ensuring a Free Media*

All over the world the media plays an important role in politics in general and democracy in particular. In politics, communication is essential to transmit information and debate national issues. The media - print and electronic - is a reliable information channel that serves not only to transmit information in the form of news but also to educate people in various political, economic, and socio-cultural issues as well as to provide entertainment. The media performs other important functions as well and these include, during elections, identifying issues that influence people's voting decisions. The media epitomizes freedom of expression, which is a critical condition, for example, for free and fair elections. The political agendas of various parties and their candidates are discussed and people obtain informed analyses that assist them to make decisions on, for example, what party to vote for on polling day. The media is also a serious critic of government and its policies. Through investigative journalism the media is able to reveal to the public many malpractices by the government and its officials. This is particularly true in the case of contracts entered into between the government and foreign private companies in lucrative sectors such as mining, energy, tourism and defence.

On the other hand, the government relies on the media to get its messages across to the people. It relies on the radio, television and the print media to reach the people. And in the not distant past, personal rulers built their personality cult using the state-owned and/or controlled media, mainly the radio and sometimes television. But to serve as an important instrument for democracy the media must be free and operate in an environment unencumbered by oppressive laws. Journalists, editors and media owners must work in freedom without fear of arrest, prosecution or any kind of censorship. The obtaining situation in Tanzania with respect to freedom of the press is not ideal for the media to play its role. The media laws in Tanzania limit the freedom of the press in a number of ways including the threat of deregistration, prosecution for defamation and sedition, seizure and



forfeiture of property and banning publication. Provisions empowering government officials, including ministers and the police, to implement the above mentioned sanctions are contained in such Acts as the Tanzania Newspaper Act (1976), the Registration of News Agents, Newspapers and Books Act (1988) of Zanzibar, Tanzania Societies Ordinance (1954), the Societies Act (1995) of Zanzibar, the Tanzania Broadcasting Services Act (1993) and the Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission Act (1997).

The media fraternity in Tanzania has carried out a protracted struggle to ensure a thriving media with maximum freedoms guaranteed. Political parties do not seem to have appreciated the significance of this struggle. They have not, for example, adopted and systematically represented the media concerns in parliament. They have hardly mentioned the plight of the media in their election manifestos in the three multiparty elections held in Tanzania since 1995. The challenge for political parties regarding the media is therefore two-fold: on the one hand political parties need to take up the concerns of the media and present them in parliament. They need to work out modalities to have the repressive medial laws amended or repealed. On the other hand, political parties need to institutionalize and reform themselves so that they can effectively work together with the media that is now performing some of the functions of parties.

Political parties can jointly work with the media to enhance a free flow of information. The ability to access and publicize information is a fundamental need of a politically active civil society. A free media is the primary vehicle for state and society to communicate their interests and concerns, therefore, a plural array of nongovernmental, independent information sources, including print and broadcast media and increased access to internet connections, is essential. The media serves as a watchdog over both government and civil society. For this reason the press frequently has few friends and is often the target of severe government censorship and control. Defamation and libel laws, as well as broadcast and press laws, are designed to maintain government controls rather than protect the media industry. Political parties must fight for reform of the legal and regulatory structures needed to support the growth of a vigorous media sector. This is in line with the struggle to institutionalize good governance which we discuss next.

#### *Institutionalizing Good Governance*

Political parties in Tanzania have to spearhead the struggle to institutionalize good governance. Many Tanzanians recognize the intrinsic values of

democracy – elections, human rights and representation – however, they are also concerned with the government’s ability to function. In general, governance issues pertain to the ability of government to develop an efficient and effective public management process. Because citizens lose confidence in a government that is unable to deliver basic services, the degree to which a government is able to carry out its functions at any level is often a key determinant of a country’s ability to sustain democratic reforms. Tanzanians, like many other citizens of the world, believe the process of governing is ultimately most legitimate when it is infused with democratic principles such as transparency, pluralism, citizen participation, and accountability. In Tanzania corruption is increasingly recognized as a constraint to both building democratic governance and stimulating economic development. The challenges for political parties in ensuring good governance lie in the following areas.

First is creating a transparent policy making process. This can be achieved by strengthening the oversight function of the legislature. It is known that as democracy expands and deepens, legislative bodies must become independent power centres with stronger links to constituents. The way policies are made and implemented continues to be crucial to development. Increasing emphasis must therefore be given to making the process more visible, transparent, accountable, and participatory. Political parties represented in parliament have a special role in this regard. Second is strengthening the legislature. As the primary arena for citizens to express and pursue their needs and interests, the legislature is a critical element of a democratic system. However, in Tanzania, multiparty politics is still young and legislators are still learning their roles and responsibilities. The jurisdiction of the legislature vis-à-vis the other branches of government (particularly the executive) is not sufficiently defined and understood by all legislators. This means that the legislature is on some occasions unable to effectively serve as a forum for public debate and incapable of providing executive oversight.

Third is fighting corruption. Corruption has been acknowledged as a scourge that denies people their rights, retards development, and creates inequality as it hurts the poor more than the rich. Concerned observers have noted; for example, that in Tanzania corruption has permeated all sectors to the extent that improving public sector governance does not necessarily solve the problem (URT, 1996 and 2002; World Bank, 1998). The presidential commission on corruption reported in 1996 that the spread of all types of

corruption was due not to the absence of appropriate policies, institutions, rules, regulations and procedures, but rather to the non-observance of the established rules and the ineffectiveness of the established institutions. This is also the conclusion of Robert Klitgaard (1998), who has written extensively on corruption and economic development. Klitgaard relates the scope of corruption (C) to the presence of monopoly power (M), discretion (D), and an absence of accountability (A) in the formula:  $C=M+D-A$ . In this sense corruption has a political dimension, which can arise from the way in which politics are financed and power managed. When corruption is deeply rooted in society, the fight against it is a long-term challenge, which involves both institutional and attitudinal reform. The challenge requires the establishment of transparent procedures, holding both public and private sector actors accountable, strengthening the judicial system to handle corruption cases efficiently, but also the participation of civil society in all its forms in the anti-corruption battle.

Pursuant to the above, political parties may, for example, demand and introduce in parliament bills that seek to strengthen the Public Accounts Committee's capacity to review the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) reports. The Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament should hold open hearings on the CAG reports. Political parties may also introduce in parliament bills that seek to strengthen the CAG and provide adequate budget resources. In that regard the government should be implored to consider giving greater independence and incentives for CAG staff who should be removed from the civil service (World Bank, 1998). The centrality of political parties in the battle against corruption cannot be overemphasized. Suffice it to say political parties, both in parliament or outside parliament, can play a major role in putting in place the right policies, rules, regulations and procedures. Parliament (and especially all parties represented therein) can exercise its oversight function to demand accountability of institutions (both public and private) to stamp out corruption. With respect to attitudinal reform, political parties can have a significant influence if they systematically embark on an anti-corruption program individually or collectively. Individually, each political party may start by stating its position in its election manifesto and raise the issue during election campaigns. In that way the party would be educating the people and show them that corruption can be fought. Collectively the parties may use their joint forum - the Tanzania Centre for Democracy - to work together on a program to fight corruption.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion I would like to advance one more proposition and that is political parties need to do three things if they are to be relevant to the democratization process in Tanzania. Foremost, the parties have to be credible. To be able to play their role in the democratic political process, political parties need to avoid a number of pitfalls that most of them have become entangled in. In that regard they need first, to avoid what Wiseman (1996) calls being 'vanity parties' that serve more as a vehicle for party bosses than as an aggregation of ideological or policy demands. The problem with many parties is that they are not guided by issue-driven politics. They use far too much energy and time blaming the ruling party. They demand revision of the constitution; an end to government corruption and abuse of human rights; they support plural politics; they call for the institutionalization of good governance but overall they lack a coherent and sustainable ideological master plan for restructuring society. They are most deficient in providing a plausible alternative to statist approaches to economic policy.

Secondly, political parties need to realize that democratization is more than fighting for political rights, horizontal accountability, and the guarantee that effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives. Political parties need to understand that the political rights of participation cannot produce political equality in the face of extreme socio-economic inequality (Blaauw, 2007). Building democracy and institutionalizing and sustaining democracy involve restructuring economic policy to address issues of an unequal distribution of economic resources. This is essential because it tackles the major problem of unequal distribution of economic resources that puts the poor at a disadvantage in exercising their civil and political rights. It is not enough for political parties to criticize government corruption, demand accountability and transparency, call for rule of law and equality among citizens. What is critical for political parties in the Tanzanian context is to pursue social democracy. For democracy to be successful, it must address the vexed question of economic rights and social justice. Simply put "democracy as a developmental ideology must provide for people's basic needs such as access to food, housing, medical care, and a clean environment" (Blaauw, 2007: 191).

Thirdly, political parties need to understand and deliberately pursue a different approach to current liberal political teaching. As Claude Ake (1993: 241) pointed out "... for African democracy to be relevant and sustainable it will have to be radically different from liberal democracy ... it will have to

de-emphasize abstract political rights and stress concrete economic rights, because the demand for democracy in Africa draws much of its impetus from the prevailing economic conditions within. Ordinary Africans do not separate political democracy from economic democracy or for that matter from economic-well-being". Political parties need to have a concrete democratic agenda – an alternative ideological master plan – that has at its heart strategies to address itself with, among others, issues such as the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of living standards. To achieve this, political freedoms must be supported by effective economic delivery. Van de Walle (2002) and Bratton and Mattes (2001) posit also that strong economic performance facilitates a peaceful movement towards greater democracy. Moreover, strong economic performance also increases the legitimacy of regimes and contributes to political stability.

Political parties need to realize that for democracy to have a positive meaning, they must also have an economic content. In other words, if democracy is to be consolidated in Tanzania, the social advancement of people's livelihoods must also enjoy priority. Observing the Namibian experience, Henning Melber (quoted in Blaauw, 2007:194) writes: "the anti-colonial movement's proclaimed goals and perspectives were not only about fighting the oppressive and exploitative system of Apartheid colonialism. The liberation struggle was at the same time about creating conditions for a better life after Apartheid – not only in terms of political and human rights but also with regard to the inextricably linked material dimensions to human well being and a decent living of those previously marginalized and excluded from the benefits of wealth created (to large extent by them)". Political parties in Tanzania seem to emphasize procedural aspects of (liberal) democracy – government by the consent of the governed, free and fair elections, formal political equality, inalienable human rights including right to political participation, accountability of power to the governed and the rule of law.

The basic challenge for political parties in Tanzania is therefore not only fighting to institutionalize procedural elements of (liberal) democracy but also to ensure that substantive dimensions of democracy are as important as its procedural ones. In simple terms, political parties in Tanzania must pursue a political agenda – the alternative ideological master plan – that will ensure a process of socio-economic transformation that produces political goods including basic necessities such as shelter, food and water for everyone, jobs for all, and equality in education. The master plan must be

pursued vigorously until ordinary citizens – local traders, housewives, farmers and workers – stop asking one question that recurs repeatedly in discussions: what tangible benefits has democracy brought us?

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