

# THE AFRICAN REVIEW

A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs

Volume 21 Number 1 and 2 Combined.

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# LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN AFRICA

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## INTRODUCTION

The October 1994 Local Government Elections are unique in at least one important aspect: the attention that they have attracted in the country. We all know that there was a high degree of apathy on the part of the population. This was clearly manifested in the very low voter turn out for registration. Yet even this low response to calls for registration was noticeable because of the attention that was being paid to this election exercise. Politicians, academicians, diplomats and other groups keenly followed the organization of the elections. The Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University arranged a comprehensive research and monitoring of the elections. While this has been done for every presidential and parliamentary elections since 1965, this was the first time that coverage was being extended to local government elections.

Tanzania is not unique in this respect. The above observations also hold true for many countries in Africa. There is a new interest in local government in general, and local elections in particular. The following section looks at the changing context for local government in Africa; section three looks at the status of local government elections; and section four concludes.

## 2. CHANGING CONTEXT AND PROSPECTS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

For many African countries, decentralization and local government has been a journey beset by obstacles and hazards to the extent that it has yielded only uncertain benefits. This does not mean local government is new in Africa. On the contrary, many countries have attempted administrative decentralization. In fact, poor relations between the central authorities and the local population which existed during the colonial period caused post-independent African rulers to introduce various forms of modified decentralization measures. Thus though most post colonial governments endorsed the colonial type of local governance at the time of independence, there were, shortly afterwards, a strong ideological desire to reform colonial structures through some form of decentralization. Unfortunately, the decentralization measures taken were aimed more at improving planning and implementation of development activities than at increasing popular political participation (Conyers, 1983). This was the typical case of delegation of administrative authority by central governments to the lower arms of government. No real devolution of power to the people at the grassroots was effected. Central government institutions reigned over local government institutions. It follows that local government units were not autonomous. As a result, decentralization measures achieved the opposite of what was envisaged; instead of reducing central control and increasing opportunities for popular participation, they limited them.

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In Africa, the modern forms of local government are still shaped by colonial heritage, as well as new patterns of service delivery that have come to the fore since independence. Thus decentralization in Sub-Saharan Africa has taken various forms. To that end it is possible to find in different anglophone, francophone and lusophone countries, different mixes of models of decentralization. Particularly these have evolved around the devolution of powers to local authorities; the delegation of functions to local authorities; the decentralization of administrative tasks to local ministerial organizations; and the transfer of functions to technical bodies such as public enterprises (Laley and Olowu, 1989).

In instituting their local governments, African countries have drawn their inspiration from the French, the British and the Soviet models. We should hasten to add that these countries (African) did not wholly adapt these models but looked for centralist aspects with minimal attention being paid to the checks and balances. Emphasis has been on decentralization of administrative structures rather than political devolution, hence more on political control than on political participation. Attempts to explain this orientation have centred on uncertain leadership legitimacy, fragile national unity, and, in the most extreme, the fact that local activities are considered extrinsic to central concerns. We can add that this had been a result of models imported from abroad which have of necessity been that of regulatory aspect of administration and not the transfer of power to effectively enforce development initiatives. Laley and Olowu (ibid) have put this in the following perspective: "In search for participation, there has been a proliferation of local authority units which, however, are not accorded full local government power to attract and stimulate participation".

It is easier then to note that many local governments in Africa are fragmented. In Francophone Africa, the French traditions place local government within a vertical hierarchy of governmental institution; locally elected assemblies have legislative powers but executive responsibilities are in prerogative of administrators with dual responsibility to central and local government. The central government continues to appoint local government officials. This form of local administration structures drew its inspiration from the prefectural system as applied in France.

The post independent years therefore saw the emergence of Regions, Departments, or Prefecture or provinces, sons-prefectures, circonscriptions administrative, arrondissements etc. in virtually all the Francophone Sub-Saharan African countries (ibid). This multi-tiered hierarchical field administration system was manned by centrally appointed bureaucrats. Coming out of this structure is the fact that decentralization through local government grounded to an abrupt halt while centralization became more dominant in the strengthening of territorial field administration, particularly in rural areas.

On the other hand, British traditions treat municipalities as separate political, legal and administrative entities but subject them to various degrees of external supervision. As such, rural and urban local government in Anglophone Africa is characterized by partnership, that is functions are performed by either central or local government. In this structure co-ordination is achieved at the regional level.

At the same time, the Anglophone and Lusophone African Countries show a great diversity of experiences in the area of decentralization. This can be partly explained by the differences between the colonial system and partly by the experiences developed by

each independent country. On balance, however, the Anglophone experience reveals a great deal of similarity inspite of major reforms toward democratic and participatory forms of local government sponsored by these countries now and then.

To conclude this part then, past decentralization measures were mainly aimed at the promotion of central government administrative efficiency and not promotion of empowerment and popular democracy. No wonder local governments have been performing poorly as they are heavily burdened and at the same time denied key elements of democratic governance.

The local government system is nonetheless an important element in the social and political fabric of Africa. However, research in six different countries generally point to the conclusion that the local government system is not very popular at the grassroots of a society. Most people view with suspicion the changes which the re-establishment of local authorities have brought in their local communities, and would, therefore, like to see the institution radically overhauled. In fact many of the people interviewed were so much demoralized by the local government performance to the extent that they expect years ahead to be more difficult with or without a change in government.

However, taking into account the severity of the problems and the near total absence of democratic institutions in society it must be acknowledged that local authorities system represents a significant step in the direction of democracy. As fora for the airing of views and complaints about how localities are governed, the local government brings a modicum of openness to political life. The main problem of local authorities is that they have failed to promote community development, maintain acceptable levels of social service provision, exhibit accountability and transparency in their operations, and widen political participation in local affairs.

Yet even with the above disappointments and even disgust, nobody advocates the disbandment of local government. Instead there are calls for the strengthening and democratization of these institutions, including the provision of adequate funding, recruitment of skilled personnel and their proper remuneration, efficient and effective management, transparency, and accountability to the electorate who are also their clientele. People at the grassroots in both rural and urban Africa remain strongly in favour of local government, but a reformed and strengthened one.

To this very strong voice in support of local government, one must add several other voices (some of them backed by the purse) which together make local government an irresistible form of organization in the nineties and beyond. One of the voices is the universal democracy project. The attractiveness of Democracy as the way to go in the organization of peoples, societies, and nations is currently overwhelming. One can only resist this trend at the risk of being castigated, denounced and even shunned. Every person, country, and organization wants to be seen to be democratic and even to be seen to be promoting democracy. Democracy, to borrow from Kuhn (1962) is now the dominant paradigm.

The second important factor is the institutional form that democracy is taking, i.e. multi partism. All registered and even unregistered political parties support local government. The ruling and dominant political party in Tanzania, CCM, in its new post-Ujamaa policy declaration (1992) maintains that: "Local government is a basic



component of people's power because it consists of institutions that enable people to rule themselves democratically... in the nineties, CCM will continue to educate citizens so that they understand clearly the fact that local government is their instrument ..." (Own translation). The Union for multi-party democracy (UMD) even goes further in its support for local government. UMD advocates a variation of a federal structure. The party calls for the creation of a few powerful and big provinces, like in the colonial days, to replace the current twenty-three regional administrative units. The diminution if not whole scale abolition of regional administration has also featured in the Presidential Tax Commission's report. The commission noted that "about two-thirds of the regional government's responsibilities have been shifted to the local governments, but the regions' resources (including funds, manpower, and equipment) remained largely intact. It recommends that this be "urgently remedied". Incidentally, other powerful international financiers now call for an even more severe reduction in the number of regions. A recent report concludes that "Regional spending could be reduced by two-thirds and reallocated to local governments, the budgets of local governments could be increased by TShs. 9 billion, or 25 per cent of their budgets. This could be done by consolidating the number of regional governments from 20 to a smaller number (say four to five) as used to be the case earlier.

International financial forces (IFF) are also strongly in favour of local government. A recent IFF publication was very unequivocal with regard to the future of local government in Tanzania. The report says "A strategy for strengthening Local Governments should be adopted by mid-1994 and should be implemented in 1994/95. As part of this strategy financial resources and skilled personnel should be transferred from Regional governments to local governments, where they are in extremely short supply".

Increased foreign activity at the grassroots is another important factor. In Tanzania, for example, in some districts expenditure by donor countries, international agencies, and NGOs is far more than central government expenditure. In Bukoba Rural District for example: during 1992/3 financial year, total central government and local government financial resources totaled TShs. 565.6 million. In the same year the Dutch funded Bukoba Rural Development Programme alone pumped in TShs. 630 million. UNICEF and SIDA (HESAWA) added another TShs. 87 million together making a total of TShs. 717 million from the three sources. These are, it would seem, powerful centrifugal forces that support and promote further strengthening of local governments.

It is also important to note that, these various voices and forces are motivated by varying and even conflicting reasons. The people want to be heard and served. They want democracy and services. Those in the democracy project are interested in legitimate, transparent and accountable government, and even human rights. Political parties are always motivated by power mongering but some have the concern for people's welfare. The various international actors have many motivations that we can't go into here. The powerful financial institutions and some bilateral finances are interested in a small (even weaker) state apparatus at the centre, a freer market forces and a free reign to individualism.

If Decentralization is approached as an undoing of centralization, the above forces need to be located within a wider African socio-political economy. Within that perspective several forces have been at play which together with the above mentioned factors are bound to result in even more de facto decentralization. Economic liberalization and

structural adjustment policies have led to, among other things: withdrawal of the state from many sectors and functions including crop purchase cum marketing, goods distribution and provision of free health and education. Other forces and actors are now players in these areas.

The African Socialists ideology which for a long time played the roles of pure and practical ideology also was a monolithic entity. Its many variants like Ujamaa sought to fill all the ideological space in Tanzania, and provided a basis and a justification for the total exclusion of ideas, deeds, organizational forms and practices that were deemed anti-Ujamaa. The remarkable experimentation in organizational forms and, practices including the attempts at Decentralization analyzed in this study were a result of this ideology. Organizational goals, efficiency, effectiveness, desirability and acceptability were all determined on the basis of the tenets of Ujamaa. The decline of Ujamaa has inevitably meant the removal of a formidable straight-jacket. The replacement of the Arusha Declaration by the Zanzibar declaration has resulted in the emergence of many "ideologies" as well as many thought centres. Anything and everything is now more or less fine. The one monolithic unifying ideology is gone. The emerging racial tensions, and even the Union problem must be seen in this perspective.

It also needs to be pointed out that economic liberalization, structural adjustment policies, state shrinkage and abandonment of its social roles, the Zanzibar declarations, justifications of leadership accumulation and corruption have all strengthened individualism at the expense of the community and have given prominence to private as opposed to public interests. The increasing instances of corruption and embezzlement of public resources needs to be seen in the above perspective.

The above have been reinforced by changes in leadership from the first generation of leaders, like Nkrumah, Senghor and others who had a clear commitment to public service. The change from President Nyerere to Ali Hassan Mwinyi is a case in point. Mwinyi's management and decision making style, in line with his personality is non-assertive, hesitant and at times un-informed. He keeps quiet when he should be speaking up, whispers when he should be shouting, and leaves many wondering whenever he breaks his silence because of the partiality, partisanship and superficiality of some of his thoughts, decisions and even actions. His tolerance for the corrupt, crooked, liars and the incompetent is amazing. The floating of the law and ignoring of set organizational procedures is now institutionalized. State affairs are conducted through back stairs pressure, dinner ("Charity") table instructions and scribbles on Ikulu stationery. This environment has led to a proliferation of power and money centres. The monolithic decision making hierarchy centred on the Presidency (Nyerere) is gone. Powerful ministers, civil servants, Regional Commissioners, Mayors, often in alliance with religious or family groups can get away with many things. This has generally eroded the capacity and willingness of the centre to act with one voice. In fact the centre is now perceived to be incapable of resolute uniform decision and action as exemplified by the President promising workers a pay rise during his May-Day speech in 1993, and then failing to fulfil that promise.

The above has been reinforced by several other developments in Africa in general and in Tanzania's body politic in particular. These are: struggles for succession in the ruling party, after Mwinyi; struggles for succession to the Presidency and other state positions within the ruling party; and the shift of decision making power from the party (single party supremacy) to the state bureaucracy. These have further added to the



centrifugal forces within the Tanzanian body politic. As studies by Ndumbaro and Killian amply demonstrate, powers and prerogatives of the party in decision making has now been whittled away in favour of Bureaucrats who can negotiate with IMF and World Bank.

The relationship to International capital, especially the two multi-lateral financial institutions, the IMF and the World Bank, and certain countries of the North especially Sweden, Denmark, EEC, USA, United Kingdom, or more generally the so called Paris Club is also important. The Tanzanian state, like other African states, has lost the initiative in very important areas to these countries and institutions. In the planning field, for example, the government of Tanzania acknowledges that 'Five Year Plans and Annual Plans continued to be approved, even though their influence on economic policy was less than that of the parallel documents presented to the international financial institutions'. This once again is decentralization with very long term significance and implications.

This study therefore submits that the combination of the effects of all these forces and factors is towards a less centralized, less cohesive and powerful state in terms of its relationship to the market place and private groups in policy, its ideological hegemony and cohesion, its relationship with the peripheral rural areas, and its relationship with international capital. Relatedly, the forces for *de jure* decentralization manifested in the form of local government institutions are at the moment, and for years to come irresistible. This is more so because of the forces and factors resulting in *de facto* decentralization in many areas and forms.

Yet celebrations for decentralization must be tempered by an awareness of things that can go wrong, of extremes that can do harm, and of unintended consequences that may be hard to contain, let alone reverse. To repeat what was started at the beginning of this paper, the issue of Decentralization is not a simple two valued choice; it is an empirical proposition of how much, where, when, under what conditions, toward what purpose, and from whose perspective.

From our theoretical standpoint, this should come as no surprise. If one thinks of Centralization as one end point a continuum, one does not find decentralization at the other end of the continuum. The logical absolute opposite of centralization is anarchy or non-organization, whereby decentralization occupies a certain point between these two extremes. The location of decentralization on this continuum should be the result of empirical inquiry. Yet one need not be a genius to see that what started out as decentralization can slide towards the other end of the continuum, namely anarchy. For example, arrangements for regional autonomy can very easily lead to cession, while calls for a small, transparent and accountable seat can also lead to non-government.

Recent developments in Tanzania have shown several trends with negative unintended consequences. First, it is now evident that local government autonomy and prerogatives can be abused by incumbents for their benefits and to the disadvantage of the public good and National interest. The endless scandals in Dar es Salaam involving the illegal allocation of prime land to Asian and Arab businessmen and government officials is a case in point. Open spaces, school playgrounds, and areas reserved for roads and other infrastructural developments have been given away by officials of the Dar es Salaam City Council. In northern Tanzania, Local Authorities have signed away huge tracks of prime range land to foreign businessmen and other

shady characters in return for a few thousand dollars for development. In these and other cases, the central government has had to intervene, albeit after a lot of public pressure.

Secondly, conflicts of interest are bound to emerge between local governments and the central government. One likely source of conflict is environmental degradation. Recent history shows that local authorities strapped for even will stop at literally nothing to raise cash. Tree felling, unregulated fishing (often with dynamite) land leasing (even of natural swamps) have been occurring, yet are a threat to the environment. Central government has had to intervene. The central government and the ruling party intervention in other areas has not been as innocent and for the common good. The ruling party and its government have blocked or interfered with the development levy collection efforts of some local authorities for political reasons. A recent example is the recent by-elections for a parliamentary seat in Ileje where during the campaigns women were exempted from the development levy. This was an effort on the part of the ruling party to shore up its support. Such trends will even be intensified as full scale general parliamentary and presidential elections approach. Multi-partism seems to intensify pressure on the part of the ruling party to intervene in local government issues so as to be seen to be doing something.

Finally, one must not lose sight of the limitation of the local government as currently constituted to become a formidable national democratic force. Local government bodies are diverse, each with jurisdiction over a specific geographical area. There is very little institutional co-operation between them. There is no over-arching national organ for these councils that is representative and powerful. Their key pre-occupation remains local parochial issues of survival, of making ends meet.

### 3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

In most of the local government elections, grassroots participation is rather low. Rarely does the level of electoral participation reach the 50 per cent mark. This relatively low turnout in the participation of local elections has created deep concern among many people who believe that reasonably high levels of political involvement are crucial in maintaining healthy democratic politics. Unfortunately, the first generation of empirical voting research focused primarily on parliamentary and presidential elections often to the complete exclusion of local government elections. Indeed a perusal of the work on African politics exposes a rather striking tendency in studies of elections to ignore or soft pedal the elections at the local level.

We propose to find out why participation in local government elections have been very low, when compared to parliamentary and presidential elections. We do not have comprehensive comparative data from many countries, but we can still ask ourselves: Do such things as modes of registration, low literacy rates, forms of ballot, and electoral administration act as potential deterrents that lead to low participation in local government elections?

Two prominent characteristics of local government elections in Africa are: extremely low voter participation and considerable voters ignorance of both issues and candidate position on those issues. This extreme apathy to local elections is however typical of many parts of the world and only serve to confirm that local government is not intrinsically a subject of major importance: local elections have small nationwide



interest and significance. In most cases, councils are taken for granted and local residents do not envisage them playing any role as attention is usually focused on MPs.

Apart from voters ignorance on issues, this apathy can also be explained by the absence of critical burning issues that excite and interest the electorate. To many people, therefore, the results would probably not make much difference to their survival and the management of local affairs.

Most significant, however, is the fact that grassroots population has for a long time remained in the background. In a situation where genuine and well-organized popular movements are lacking, where mass poverty leaves little room for political activism, and where long years of repression have stifled open dissent concerted efforts are needed to foster grassroots participation through the institution of autonomous local government structures. In other words, what the local government was given with one hand was taken away with the other. As Mill long ago noted:

It is no use having a universal suffrage and participation in the national government if the individual has not been prepared for this participation at the local level; it is at this level he learns how to govern himself. A political act, to be done only once in a few years and; for which nothing in the daily habits of the citizen has prepared him leaves his intellect and moral dispositions very much as it found them (Mill, J.S. (1910), Quoted in Puteman, 1970).

Therefore, unless there is pressure from below for deeper changes, the movement toward democracy would easily falter.

Therefore elections can be legitimate only if the entire electoral process is a sound one, in which efforts are made to enfranchise and encourage voters turnout. We argue that many African Countries have dysfunctional electoral systems that decrease competition between parties and foster soft campaign funds and in some instances, corruption. This has meant the shift from party to candidate-centered campaigns. Election expenses are mounting day by day so that a common man finds it impossible to contest. Most ordinary people, with modest means of livelihood fail to get posts in the parties or be elected in the various structures at the local level. And their roles in the primaries are not decisive in determining the eventual winners.

As such, electoral systems in Africa have been ridden by several maladies: the evil influence of money power, muscle power, multiplicity of parties and candidates, misuse of official machinery by the party in power and financial permissiveness of political parties. Instances of impersonation, criminal acts of intimidation, use of muscle power, money power and blatant violation of the code of conduct by the contesting candidates and dubious standards followed by the candidates and parties concerned in condemning openly the forces of social heterogeneity and primordialism exploiting the same for ensuring their political fortunes have adversely affected the sanctity, health and virility of the democratic political and electoral processes (Alderfer,

1964). The strength and durability of democracy would depend on the conduct of elections in a free and fair manner as these elections constitute the life giving blood stream of democracy. Increasing resort to the use of corrupt practices on a large scale has often resulted in sapping the moral, social and political strength of democracy. There is a need therefore of building a sense of service and dedication to the people.

In some cases, faulty electoral systems have led to the opposition's boycott of local elections. Ironically, some parties have entered elections knowing explicitly that they are fighting a losing battle. This has often resulted in instances where parties fell to squabbling over alleged irregularities in the polling and ambiguities in the text of the code. This has led voters to ask themselves whether the parties fail to foresee the weakness of the system - making them guilty of negligence and incompetence, or whether they had perceived the potential difficulties but kept silent, planning to bring them up only if the results were unfavourable.

Local democratization for accountable government and civic participation is an important end in itself. This entails opening up territorially based sub-national governments to electoral competition. It also means the elimination of exclusionary political practices, including fraud, unfair limits on voters registration, the lack of ballot secrecy, voter intimidation, and vote buying. These concern more the issues of electoral freedoms, as distinct from issues of electoral fairness such as media access, campaigns financing and so forth.

We are making a strong argument for local democratization because the civil society provides an especially strong foundation for democracy when it generates opportunities for participation and influence at all levels of governance, not least the local level, for it is at the local level that the historically marginalized are most likely to be able to affect public policy and develop a sense of efficacy as well as actual political skills. The democratization of local government then goes hand in hand with the development of the civil society as an important condition for the deepening of democracy. Rousseau (1968) had long seen this necessity:

Once the participatory system is established; and this is a point of major importance, it becomes self-sustaining because the very qualities that are required of individual citizens if the system is to work successfully are those that the process of participation itself develops and fosters; the more the individual citizen participates, the better able he is to do so.

But who is then going to spearhead these changes?

Even where competitive elections occur, such as in Nigeria, their costs have been considerable. This is with reference to the money spent lavishly on election campaigns - money which almost certainly has been siphoned from public coffers. In such a situation, the likelihood of rigged elections is quite higher; and complaints will always follow the election results.



However, many electoral malpractices have been attributed to anomalies in Election Commissions set up. Argument can be advanced of the internal contradictions and inconsistencies in the evolution of many National Election Commissions - which are key institutions in the political programme. Not much effort has been done to develop them into autonomous, non-partisan and professional organizations involving various technocrats who would have provided consultancy and monitor local elections scheduled under the transition programme. As such, with few exceptions, no attempts are done to create data bases on voting behaviour and on obstacles to popular electoral participation at local levels. The competence of these institutions would have been enriched by establishing new standards in the management of elections in the respective countries thereby enhancing the organizations' prestige and relative autonomy.

We stress the independence and autonomy of NECs because while at local level where voters belong to small and fairly transparent communities, cases of electoral manipulation might be rare - Thus, in itself, guaranteeing fair elections. But these elections might also not necessarily be fine. Rules of the game are such that they set narrow limits to the openness of participation in the elections. Similarly, under such a deteriorating culture, elections have merely served as instruments to extend the political life of regimes. Clear tensions can be detected between the ruling regimes' need to legitimize their rule by holding popular elections, and their unwillingness to risk losing control of political power. Election rules are designed in such a way that the ruling cliques are assured of their continued hold on power. It is due to this that though many election results are a foregone conclusion, still coercion and bribery are often used to maximize the scale of victory. Sweeping electoral victory can be an effective propaganda weapon to bolster the internal and external legitimacy of the regime at local levels. In such contexts the function of elections become that of providing virtual regime support rather than offering opportunities to meaningful participation in public policy making, political recruitment and socialization.

It is significant to note also that the majority of those who do not vote in local government elections fail to do so because of the disbelief in voting and ... encompassing specific attitudes sometimes labeled low sense of civic duty. In other words from a cost-benefit perspective the cost of voting outweigh its benefits. Yet surely one explanation for minimal electoral participation at the local level lies in the amount and intensity of political mobilization. In most instances candidates are or are not highly competitive and political parties are or are not well organized and vigorous. This means that efforts at political mobilization have diminished in effectiveness. Experience from other countries has shown that partisan or group mobilization of electorates may virtually overwhelm the effects of social stratification or attitudinal predispositions on electoral participation (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978). Therefore, voting at the local level is not seen as being important, at least in part because of electoral demobilization resulting from the weakening of links between political parties and the social structure.

It should also be noted that in all countries a citizen must register in order to cast a vote, not only in presidential and parliamentary elections but also in local government elections. Countries have rather different laws regarding the qualifications for voting so that it is not possible to draw an all out conclusion covering all countries. Suffice to say that such provisions as closing date of registration, regularity of hours of registration stations and availability of registration for absentees have had significant

and profound impact on electoral participation. In such a situation we are led to believe that the simple expedient of permitting registration until the day of election, problematic as it is, might elevate electoral participation. Verba, Nie and Kim (ibid) have concluded that in the presence of such institutional incentives to vote as a close alignment between partisan and social divisions, automatic registration, a competitive party system, and the administrative facilitation of voting, individual level barriers can easily be overridden.

If institutional changes can considerably overcome barriers to participation at the polls at the level of the individual, then the problem of low electoral participation can be ameliorated. Efforts should be made to make local government elections more competitive through immediate changes of policy, such as encouraging party organizational strength, party loyalty, a strong role for parties in the recruitment of candidates, and public funding of the political parties. There is of course a good reason in every country to extend the duration for registration, for instance, to about a week before the election.

We have already alluded to the fact that candidates in local government elections are not competitive. Many who contest to be elected as councillors are scarcely literate not knowing even what the local government is in the first place. They mainly consist of traditional local elites who are all out to use the institution of local councils to strengthen their position in society. Most of the candidates' ages fall within the general range of 30-55 years, but in many local government elections age does not seem to be a major determining factor. Since marital stability is considered an important indicator of good character, very few contestants are unmarried.

At the local level, education is not considered a main qualification for one to be elected. Qualities such as good character, ability to mediate in various local issues and personal popularity are more important. As such, those who contest for election are not necessarily the most educated members of the locality. In countries which have a national language other than English, French or Portuguese - such as Tanzania, knowledge of those foreign languages is neither demanded nor commonly found among contestants, since upon their election as councillors they have few opportunities to interact with officialdom from outside the immediate locality. As such, candidates typically have a basic primary school education, sometimes less. However, better educated exceptions do occur here and there, especially from among the retired civil servants.

With reference to the occupations of candidates these mostly have to do with the general economic and historical conditions of the localities. Some may be engaged in trade or skilled crafts, some are retired soldiers, and many of them are teachers or retired teachers. It is rare to find candidates who are professionals, the business people or University graduates save for some few candidates who contest elections in urban local councils. Generally, people find it important to elect prominent individuals with social weight in the belief that this might result in development trickling down to their localities. Paternalistic notions and patron-client relationships so prominent in parliamentary elections are also evident in local government elections. Still competent persons are unwilling to contest in local government elections! It is to the consideration of this issue that we now turn.



It is evident that in many African countries less is at stake at the local level as councillors have fewer opportunities to bestow or withhold favours. Despite clear statutes which define the role of local councils within the system of local government, many central governments in Africa still set limits to their autonomy and decision-making powers. At the same time councillors are expected to devote considerable amounts of their time and energy to their official duties with earnings not corresponding to their working load. In most cases it seems as if councillorship is some kind of voluntary undertaking which is in fact difficult to sustain in any political system. In such a situation many people find it imprudent to seek leadership positions at local levels.

But also from cost-benefit analysis many people find being a councillor a liability. In a corrupt polity such as found in many African countries, the lack of resources in local councils has led many to look for greener pastures elsewhere. In Africa power means the ability to use one's position to deliver the required services or favours to the potential clients. However, the roles of councils in Africa are generally so minimal and they have largely succumbed to the increasing power of central governments. As a whole local council representatives are reduced to fulfilling largely symbolic and supportive functions. This is especially so in rural local councils. But where councillors are seen as potentially valuable allies, as in many urban local councils, the incidence of corruption is higher and so does the competence of those who contest local government elections. In other words, as power and influence of leaders and their institutions waxes and wanes, so does the likelihood that competent candidates will contest for elections in these institutions. As it has been said, abstinence or celibacy is more of a hoax when there is little or no prospect of temptation.

One cannot give an accurate overview of local government elections in Africa without talking about the participation of women. What role do women play in African political systems with reference to local government elections? For women are half the world - In Africa, they are also the producers of 70 per cent of the food but ironically the owners of less than 10 per cent of the property. Immediately after gaining political independence many governments encouraged women to participate in politics. The intensity of this campaign has been gaining momentum, peaking in the 1980s. However, the participation of women in local government affairs remains low. In several countries, governments have to reserve special seats for women so as to ensure the participation in local government elections. Reasons for this include male dominated power structures, cultural barriers and traditional societies attitudes.

While women's participation in contesting for local government positions is minimal, their participation for voting in leaders is more than considerable. Indeed, women turn out in large numbers to vote, far outnumbering men in presidential, parliamentary and local elections.

To the extent that elections have become an important mechanism in current attempts to reorder African faltering political systems, there is a demand for a fresh look at the possible mechanisms that can ensure the impartiality of the electoral system. The question is how can an electoral system be set up in such a way as to eliminate electoral malpractice? The most fundamental condition is that appropriate constitutional, legislative and administrative structures will need to be set in place in order to facilitate the progress of fledgling democracies. Oppressive laws, institutions and practices will have to be rooted out. Therefore, apart from the need for having

independent and autonomous electoral commissions, the governments should be responsive to various shortcomings. Once you have these in place, then the way would be set towards achieving meaningful popular participation.

Different electoral methods have been adapted in African countries depending on various factors, including local conditions. However, most elections follow the same basic procedures. The primary elections to nominate candidates to contest the elections are held at ward levels. In many African countries this process is followed by protests on the part of those who have not been nominated and the defeated candidates will even go to courts to challenge the results, thus sowing the seeds of intra-party conflicts. What follows are nation-wide campaigns pitting one candidate against the other. In countries such as Nigeria, these may be very expensive.

It is during these campaigns that candidates explain their party's standing in various issues. But in the main, they are loaded with empty promises which are difficult to come into fruition. What one can note from these campaigns is the complete absence on the part of candidates as to how they are going to tackle issues which really touch the local people. In the extreme, campaigns are marred by violence on the part of competing parties' members.

The critical stage, however, is that of voting. Different systems of voting are used. There is a queuing system of voting known in Kenya as "Mlolongo" system. This is said to minimize rigging. Nigeria tried this system during the 1990 local government elections. Vindicating its usefulness the Chairman of Nigerian NEC said:

In all the elections, foundation of our existence as a nation was severely shaken and required extra-constitutional intervention to ensure our continued existence as a nation... shall we continue to try a system that has failed us? shall we not try another one as we did in the choice of political parties? (Quoted in Fajonyoni, 1991).

The queuing system is in fact an open ballot system whereby the electorate queue up behind the candidate they wish to elect.

Simple as it is, the system has been received with skepticism by many people. There are those who argue that intimidation and fear of persecution by powerful candidates may bias the outcome of the elections if the voters' choice cannot be kept secret. Others are of the view that the system disenfranchises a lot of eligible voters who would not want to queue up behind any candidate. Some would simply not tolerate queuing up behind any candidate. Some would simply not tolerate queuing up in the sun for many hours. These criticisms are not without justification though. In Kenya, for instance, during the 1988 election it is estimated that about half of the MPs went to parliament through the 70 per cent electoral rule which stipulated that any candidate who mustered 70 per cent of the voters' turn out through **Mlolongo** nomination process was the winner and therefore did not require the second round of secret ballot.



Uganda also tried the system during 1989 elections with considerable success. With reference to that elections, Kasfir (1989) concluded:

Generally speaking, though with some exceptions, Ugandans considered the February, 1989 elections to be fair and democratic - the first general elections in the country's history since independence to receive widespread approval.

In general people did not want the repeat of the 1980 plots, when allegations of massive fraud by Obote's UPC resulted in five years of Civil war. Most common men and women see the potential intimidation of voters under the queuing system as less of a problem than ensuring free and fair ballot-box elections. What can be safely said here is that the open ballot system may work or not work well depending on the different circumstances.

The most popular system is the secret ballot. This is used across many countries. The only problem is that it is prone to rigging. But defending the secret ballot system with reference to Nigeria, Mohamed (1990) said:

Nigeria ... should at least not succumb to failure and discard the secret ballot ... let's not, for fear of failure, disenfranchise a great number of people, decent and respectable Nigerians who would not troop out and line up in the open to exercise their rights. What is worse, let us not make ourselves the laughing stock for the rest of the world (Quoted in op cit).

The simple fact is that members of the Council are directly elected by popular vote, whether it is open or secret. In most countries Chairmen of the Councils are elected by counsellors who, sitting as an electoral college, elect one among themselves. It is fascinating that counsellors neither consult their constituencies before making their choices, nor consider it their duty to do so.

In some countries some form of minority representation is sought through a system of proportional representation or limited voting when multimember constituencies are set up. Proportional representation is the system of voting which includes some device for allocating seats proportionately to the vote cast for each candidate (or affiliated groups of candidates) in the constituency concerned (Mackenzie, 1958). Multimember constituencies are essential to proportional representation. There are two types of proportional representation. The first one is the list system whereby the voter makes a choice between two or more lists of candidates each of which is sponsored by a party or by some other organizations. This, apart from ensuring continuity of councils, is likely to be composed heterogeneously. There is also the plurality choice - the famous first past the post formula which increases the possibility of workable majority. Proportional representative has the assurance that opposition parties will have in the aggregate significant representation. As used in some countries, the worst feature of this system, however, is that each voter may vote for one and only candidate. Up to now the system is very popular in Africa.

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