

Lessons Learned from Power-Sharing in Africa

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Several power-sharing agreements have been reached in Africa over the last decades. This project has compared the experiences of various forms of power-sharing in five countries, Burundi, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. The cases differ significantly both with regard to the implementation of power-sharing and the rationale for adopting such institutions. Our conclusions is that power-sharing institutions have proven themselves useful in some countries and less so in others. The most positive experiences have been in the peace processes of Sierra Leone and Liberia, where power-sharing played a vital role in securing peace. There are less clear support for power-sharing institutions with regard to good governance.

Introduction

This project describes power-sharing efforts in five conflict-prone and ill-governed African countries: Burundi, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. While these five countries are unique in many important ways, some overarching conclusions can nevertheless be drawn from these studies. Our studies support the conclusion that power-sharing can be a useful remedy under certain conditions. Power-sharing institutions aim to integrate all groups in the political debate through an extensive set of constraints on decision-making bodies. Examples are grand coalitions, supermajority requirements, proportionality (or over-representation of minorities) in both political and administrative bodies, and segmental autonomy, such as federalism.

Such institutions are used to promote better governance as well as to solve protracted conflicts. The actual implementation differs from case to case, and an important difference is the time dimension. Is the arrangement a temporary or a permanent one? Typically, power-sharing arrangements that primarily seek to establish a durable peace will have a sunset clause, whereas those focusing on the governance aspect are more permanent.

Inclusive or Exclusive?

Gates & Strøm (2007) distinguish is between inclusive and exclusive power-sharing institu-

tions. Inclusive institutions work towards integrating as many voices as possible into the decision-making body, whereas exclusive institutions create autonomous political spheres.

The rationale for inclusive institutions assumes that exclusion is a key to violent conflict, and is therefore very focused on not excluding any relevant group. The inclusive answer is to provide some guarantees to all parties, so that they will prefer to participate within the system rather than challenge it.

In contrast, the rationale for exclusive institutions is that one must cherish political competition rather than view it as a source of problems. The aim of these solutions is to prevent monopoly control over political institutions. Political monopolies can create opportunities for abuses of power. The answer to the problem of bad governance is therefore to force political parties to cater to the needs of the voters through competition and accountability.

The Evidence: Burundi

Burundi suffers from both distrust between the two major ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi, and a substantial spoiler problem in the form of splinter groups that have rejected the peace process.

The pre-war situation was that a southern Tutsi-dominated faction held a monopoly of power. Following atrocities in the previous decades the Tutsi UPRONA party had opened up for

