

Research interests and the Relevance of the Workshop Theme, “Electoral Systems and Political Behaviour”- Henry Amadi, University of Nairobi, Department of Political Science and Public Administration

My current research interest is entitled, “*Kenya’s Grand Coalition Government: An Agent of Change or Status-Quo Maintenance?*” which is due to be presented at the AEGIS Conference to be held in Hamburg, Germany in October 2009. The major concern of the research paper is that whereas power-sharing agreements have become important aspects of peace agreements in Africa, several questions regarding their net impact on peace, democracy and societal trust remain unanswered.

These include: their tendency to reward mainly the violent rather than peaceful political actors, their tendency to disenfranchise the electorate (i.e., the electorate have no control over the final form that government takes) and to undermine majority rule (lack of opposition reduces checks and balances which are major democratic tenets), their tendency to be pushed for mainly by outside (mediators) rather than local actors, and their tendency to be driven by short-term, parochial rather than the long-term, public interests.

Thus, although constitutional reform is among the agenda items considered most urgent in the power-sharing agreement between Mr. Kibaki (PNU) and Mr. Raila (ODM) following the post-election violence of December 2008¹, progress in this direction has continued to drag and the country is increasingly finding itself at risk of another post-election violence in 2012. The paper, therefore, seeks to demonstrate that a constitutional reform agenda, though currently compatible with the country’s national interest, is far from compatible with the partisan, ethnic and ideological interests of the members of the Grand Coalition Government. Hence, it is unlikely to be pursued vigorously by this government.

¹ This was based on the conviction that any future election is unlikely to peaceful unless conducted under a new constitutional dispensation

The main link between this study and the theme of the Accra workshop is that Power-sharing agreements in Africa appear to be increasingly a replacement of free and fair elections. Whereas competitive politics has been the hallmark of democratic government since the advent of political parties as indispensable instruments of government, it remains conspicuously absent in Africa and to some extent, the Third World. One dare say that this remains and is likely to continue being the major challenge of political development in Africa, in particular and the Third World in general.

Among the areas that require urgent reform in Kenya's constitution (as is the case in many other African countries) is its electoral system, which has since independence been inclined in favour of incumbent governments and indeed, incumbent presidents. Almost 50 years following its attainment of independence, there is still little evidence that Kenya as a country is moving from a non-competitive system to a competitive one.² It is hence, not surprising that Kenya's power sharing agreement followed a dispute over presidential election results that threatened its very existence as a country.

The Accra Workshop is hence of enormous relevance to this study as it will go along way in refining the social, economic and political impediments to smooth peaceful transfer of power, with specific reference to among other things, ethnic-based politics and its attendant exclusivist tendencies in Kenya in particular and in Africa in general. The study mainly depends on secondary data (periodicals, newspapers and government records) although these may be supplemented with primary data (interviews with politicians).

² Out of its 45 years of independent existence, it has experienced only 17 years of multi-party politics (i.e., from 1963-1969 and from 1992-the present), most of it in a non-competitive environment.