

## **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

a transition to democracy, which failed and effectively started a civil war in 1994.

Several power-sharing agreements have been negotiated and implemented, but failed to provide peace and stability, chiefly because they failed to include the main rebel organizations. In 2004, an advanced power-sharing accord was reached. This led to democratic elections and the installment of a new government in 2005.

The power-sharing provisions are very inclusive, with a grand coalition, including all parties with more than 5% of the vote, supermajority requirements in both government and parliament and an extensive set of regulations aiming to provide an overrepresentation of the minority Tutsi population.

Power-sharing has succeeded in incorporating both the major ethnic groups in the country. However, the situation is still unstable. While civil society is quite strong, there are few protections available for dissidents and others trying to exercise a check on the government, and although the government was democratically elected, it has not led the country in a very democratic fashion.

### **The Evidence: Kenya**

In Kenya elections have come to be associated with violence. Since the re-introduction of multi-party politics in 1991, three of the four subsequent elections have been marred by significant ethnic conflict.

Following the most recent election, held in December 2007, widespread inter-communal violence erupted after the Electoral Commission named the incumbent as the winner of the presidential race despite significant irregularities in the vote counting process. In January and February 2008 over 1,000 people were killed and at least 300,000 displaced from their homes.

A power-sharing agreement between Kenya's two main political parties was reached in March 2008. The accord called for the creation of a grand coalition government in which both parties would share power on an equal basis. It is otherwise a minimalist and purely inclusionary power-sharing agreement.

The agreement had the immediate effect of restoring peace and stability in Kenya. Yet, the accord's long-term durability is far from certain.

The fundamental causes of the conflict – inequalities in access to power and resources – have not been addressed. These issues remain latent sources of conflict that have the potential to derail the current grand coalition government and lead to renewed conflict.

### **The Evidence: Liberia**

During its fourteen-year civil war, Liberia was dominated by a number of rebel groups. Power-sharing was an important aspect of most peace agreements signed to end the conflict, and initially, these power-sharing institutions were set up according to consociational principles. But the problem of spoilers meant that as one peace arrangement failed after the other, power-

sharing was more and more tailored to fit the rebel organizations rather than society.

The Liberian agreements all outlined transitional governments, focusing on the next election. The first election that was carried out was won by warlord Charles Taylor in 1997, but lack of trust in his leadership prompted two rebel factions to restart the war.

Taylor's political exile in 2003 opened the way for renewed negotiations. The 2003 agreement resulted in a very broad grand coalition government, in which both warring parties and civil society were represented. This arrangement culminated in the democratic election of the current government, but it did so with the assistance of the UNMIL peace-keeping force, which managed to both pacify spoilers and reintegrate former soldiers.

The final power-sharing arrangement has proven itself a success as a transitional vehicle, but in Liberia no such arrangement has been viable without third-party guarantees.

### **The Evidence: Nigeria**

Nigeria consists of a large number of small minorities, and three regional majorities. In addition, there is a religious divide between Christians and Muslims, and a general geographic divide between Northerners and Southerners. These rifts resulted in the 1967–70 Biafra war.

Various forms of power-sharing institutions have been introduced in Nigeria after the civil war, but they have seldom been implemented in a meaningful way. Through their failures, these attempts may even have exacerbated the problems they in theory should solve.

Nigeria has been a federal state since before independence, but what started out as three states are now 36 states. The increase in the number of states is allegedly done to better integrate minorities, but the fact that many of these increases happened during military governments point to another plausible cause: a "divide and rule"-strategy.

First, while some small minorities gained representation through a state more or less of their own, their influence remained insignificant. Second, the larger ethnic groups were split up into several states, which tended to dilute the influence of these groups.

As a consequence of their inferior position, several smaller groups and fringe organizations have used violent means in Nigerian politics. In order to oppose this tendency, a number of inclusive power-sharing laws have been passed. These take statehood as a point of departure, and work towards securing each state a say in the political process.

These measures fail to address the most important issue for these minorities: the allocation of the oil income. Wealth sharing is administrated according to a number of contradictory principles, which leaves all groups more or less aggrieved.

### **The Evidence: Sierra Leone**

Power-sharing in Sierra Leone served one specific pur-

pose: to produce peace. This end was reached, although power-sharing as a system of governance failed.

The civil war (1991-2002) was prolonged since neither party had the military capacity to win, but third-party pressure forced the parties to negotiate. These talks eventually resulted in two power-sharing agreements.

The first peace agreement was signed in 1996, and allowed for RUF representation in the army and other official institutions. The 1996 agreement broke down with a military coup in 1997, but the government was reinstated the year after by direct intervention from a regional peace-keeping force.

A new peace agreement was signed in 1999. It stipulated a temporary grand coalition government that would run the country until elections in 2001. The RUF was given several ministries, and critically, oversight responsibilities for the mining industry.

Neither party had any intentions of sticking to their promises, though. In May 2000 the arrangement failed and the RUF leadership was jailed. Power-sharing was never truly implemented, but nevertheless played an important role in the peace process. It was crucial in convincing the RUF to sign the peace agreement and to lay down arms, and thus made it easier for the government and foreign forces to control them and put them out of action when they refused to abide by the terms of the agreement.

### Lessons Learned

The five cases presented here yield valuable lessons as to how power-sharing has performed with regard to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and finally good governance. The main conclusion seems to be that in these cases, power-sharing has done more to establish peace than to promote good governance.

Most of the power-sharing arrangements that we have examined are inclusive, such as grand coalitions. These inclusive arrangements tend to work better when they have a clearly defined termination date (sunset clause).

Third-parties play an important role in many of our cases. A critical point with regard to third-party involvement is that these should either go in as security guarantors or as facilitators. When forced to an agreement, the parties to a conflict are more likely to renege than if they themselves are allowed to control the pace.

### Conflict Prevention

The Kenyan power-sharing arrangement did prevent the political violence in Kenya from escalating into a civil war, which clearly was a possible outcome at the time. The fact that the incumbent believed he could get away with electoral fraud indicates that the Kenyan judiciary is not sufficiently independent to prosecute the president. Under such circumstances, a grand coalition agreement appears to be a good alternative. The ongoing process in Zimbabwe is a partly similar case that may shed further light on this approach to conflict resolution.

In Nigeria, power-sharing has been used to keep the country together and to discourage secessionist. While the effort has to some extent failed, the country has not slid back into full-scale civil war. It is also notable that the power-sharing institutions have not been well implemented. If better implemented, it is possible that Nigeria would have been less violent.

The most important lesson from Nigeria is perhaps that power-sharing necessitates effective civilian governance. While the federal system in theory should be a sensible form of governance in that country, the Nigerian implementation is in fact very centralized and highly corrupt.

### Conflict Resolution and Durable Peace

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone have made real progress since their conflicts ended, and while their experiences with power-sharing are quite different, it can be argued that power-sharing agreements were important elements of the respective peace processes.

In Liberia, the transitional grand coalition delivered on its most important task, taking the country to democratic elections. In Sierra Leone, the failure of power-sharing triggered a response from third parties that effectively ended the war. In both of these cases, heavy third-party security guarantees were critical in achieving peace. Also in both cases, peace has been durable.

In Burundi, the power-sharing arrangements have been successful in reducing the intensity of the conflict, and the last one has also been fairly successful with regard to the ethnic divide. While the conflict is still active, it is much less serious than it were some years ago.

### Good Governance

Several of the countries we examined are better governed today than they traditionally have been. Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are doing fairly well, but it is unclear to what extent this is due to power-sharing.

The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone were both rooted in previous regimes' woefully bad governance, and the current regimes are doing a better job. However neither of them is currently under any power-sharing arrangements.

Nigerian political history has been dominated by military dictators, and while far from perfect, the current democratic regime is more responsive to the needs of the population at large.

The watershed in Kenya was the 2002 victory by the Rainbow coalition and the first Kibaki government. The Rainbow coalition fell apart during Kibaki's first term in office, and his rule deteriorated as well. After the signing of the power-sharing agreements, much has in fact improved, but it is unclear whether the current government will be better than the first Kibaki period.

### Exclusive or Inclusive Institutions

Most of the examples in our study have been inclusive institutions. All of the five countries have had examples of some form of grand coalition governments.

These arrangements have primarily been introduced to lower the level of political competition by forcing competitors to cooperate. As a response to violent political competition, this has proven effective in lowering the level of conflict in four of the five countries.

Yet, this should not lead us to conclude that political competition is a source of violence and bad governance in and of itself. Rather, we believe that our cases prove the opposite. The lack of political competition and the existence of power monopolies have contributed to the misery across all our five countries.

We find that inclusive power-sharing institutions are most effective when they are set up as transitional

governments terminating with free and fair elections. The lessons from Liberia contrasted with those from Burundi indicate that allocating a role for civil society in this process also improves the chances of a positive outcome.

Yet, many of these countries could also benefit from a better post-election protection of political competition, through exclusive institutions such as independent courts and electoral commissions. In Burundi, the party that won the previous election holds control over the government, the parliament and the constitutional court. This combination is detrimental to the future of democracy in Burundi.

## Policy Recommendations

- Support Civil Society. While appeasing warlords may be necessary to build peace, civil society involvement is key to durable peace and good governance
- Do not enforce but facilitate. Unless the parties are committed to the agreement a power-sharing solution has very little chance of success.
- Multi-lateral security provision. In building peace, third-party security guarantees have proven themselves vitally important in several cases.
- Grand coalition power-sharing arrangements should have a sunset clause.

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### About the project

This policy brief forms part of a project entitled 'Power-Sharing Arrangements, Negotiations and Peace Processes', which has produced a series of policy briefs and reports on Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Kenya and Nepal.

The full report and policy briefs can be downloaded at:

<http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Research-and-Publications/Project/?oid=65122>

### About CSCW

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