



## **Is Power-Sharing a Solution to Africa's Conflicts?**

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### **Introduction**

Power-sharing has been widely used in Africa over the past two decades as a formula for managing political conflicts and crises. Such inclusive government has been attempted in some form in countries like: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros Islands, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan and Zimbabwe (Mitchell 2012, 172). It has become popular to the extent that discussions of potential power-sharing arrangements are carried out even before elections that are expected to be controversial are conducted. This was the case in the 2011 polls in Uganda (Cheeseman 2011, 337). But despite its popularity as a conflict resolution instrument, its effectiveness is questionable. In reviewing recent African cases of peace settlements from 1999 to 2007, Mehler (2009, 453) came to the conclusion that "although power sharing was a prominent aspect in most of these peace settlements, the relationship between peace and power sharing has not been so obvious as only a few of these agreements could be classified as successes". In fact, most countries that have used power-sharing to resolve their conflicts have not achieved any long lasting stability nor have they been able to establish a credible system of multiparty politics. This article seeks to explain why a method of conflict resolution so appealing in theory has failed so often in practice by outlining the different challenges that power-sharing faces on the African continent. In order to effectively do so it is important to have a clear understanding of power-sharing and its different dimensions and the theories behind the practice.

### **Defining Power-Sharing**

Power-sharing has been defined "set of principles that, when carried out through practices and institutions, provide every significant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision-making abilities on common issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group" (Traniello 2008, 31). It basically means the participation of the representatives of all significant groups in political decision-making at the level of the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, and the army. The aim of power-sharing is therefore to reduce majoritarianism by reducing the danger that one party or ethnic group becomes dominant and threatens the security of others (Papagianni 2009, 24; Cheeseman 2011, 339). Underlying these definitions is the existence of competing groups, regarded in Africa as ethnic groups and elsewhere as elites.

Power-sharing is an arrangement through which these groups manage their differences. These arrangements can and have taken place at four levels: political, territorial, military and economic.

At the political level, power-sharing involves a unity government that draws members from different groups. It refers to the allocation of specific posts in government or specific proportions in the executive, legislature, or judiciary to different groups (Sriram and Zahar 2009, 17). In the context of open conflict, power-sharing means the allocation of positions to the different warring groups. This has been the most common element in the settlement of African conflicts. This is illustrated by the case of Zimbabwe provided in this journal.

At the territorial level, power-sharing has historically been used to address the self-determination demands of minorities that are both ethnically, linguistically or religiously distinct from the rest of the country and geographically concentrated (Sriram and Zahar 2009: 17; DeRouen 2008: 1547). It provides some form of autonomy to specific groups within a national or federal government framework. The arrangement in the Comoros represents such territorial power-sharing.

Military power-sharing implies first the sharing of command posts within the army and the determination of the numbers of soldiers to be integrated in the newly constituted national army. The best example of this is Burundi where the 2003 settlement signed in Pretoria (South Africa) by the transitional government of Burundi and the main rebel group, the CNDD-FDD (Conseil National pour la Defense de la Democratie – Forces pour la Defense de la Democratie) contained provisions for an integrated general staff and officer corps composed of sixty per cent officers selected from the government army and forty per cent from the FDD, and the allocation of command posts on the basis of ethnic balance (fifty-fifty) (Mehler 2009, 458; Falch and Becker 2008).

Economic power-sharing involves the distribution of state resources between the different regions. It is often used when specific areas feel that they have not equally benefited from the existing distribution of state budgets. An example of this is the peace settlement signed in April 1999 in Antananarivo between representatives of Moheli and Grande Comore (two of the Comoros' main islands) which included an equitable sharing of resources between the islands and the central government (Mehler 2009, 459). With the growth in oil and other mineral production on the continent one should expect a greater focus on economic power-sharing arrangements between the producing areas and the central government. The 2005 Comprehensive Agreement between North and South Sudan included an economic power-sharing arrangement of the oil revenue.

### **Models of Power-Sharing**

Power-sharing arrangements to date have been premised on three different models: consociational, incentive and tri-polar. The consociational model can be traced back to Arthur Lewis who in 1965 published *Politics in West Africa*. In this study he pointed to the impracticability of democracy in plural societies. For him plural societies are divided by tribal, religious, linguistic, cultural and regional differences. The best way to govern these societies that

are predominantly found in the colonized territories of Africa, Asia and Latin America is through the formation of coalition governments (Orji 2008, 21-22). These societies are completely different from the European class societies on which democracy is based.

Using Lewis' ideas, Arend Lijphart (1977) went on to develop his consociational model as an institutionalized form of democratic conflict management for divided societies (Jarstad 2009, 45). The model focuses on elite cooperation and identifies four features: Executive power-sharing, where each of the main groups shares in executive power in a grand coalition government to ensure the participation of all leaders; distribution using the proportionality principle of offices and revenue; autonomy or self-government for each group and; the existence of veto rights, that would enable each group to prevent changes that adversely affect their vital interests (Orji 2008, 21; Spears 2000, 107; Traniello 2008, 31). This elite-based model particularly with its autonomy/self-government and veto rights has not found favor in African countries seeking to create strong and unified states. It has, however, been the basis of political power-sharing arrangements, in particular the distribution of executive offices.

The incentivist model is based on Donald Horowitz's (1985) argument that consociationalism fails to highlight the incentives for elite cooperation and inter-group accommodations. He calls for the creation of a federal system with special voting arrangements. He proposed the creation of ethnically homogenous states where groups are territorially concentrated; but, where groups are intermixed, he advocates for the creation of ethnically heterogeneous states. His argument is that such heterogeneous states will encourage elites from different ethnic background to intermingle at the state level, which in turn will ease ethnic hostilities at the national level. Furthermore a heterogeneous state will provide groups that are minority at the federal level the opportunity to become majority in one or more states, thereby compensating for their marginal influence at the federal level (Orji 2008, 25-30; Spears 202, 125-127). With respect to the electoral system, he advocates for a vote pooling arrangement. This is an exchange of votes by politicians of their respective supports to achieve victory (Orji 2008, 27). To secure pooled votes, he argues, politicians must behave moderately on issues that generate inter-group disagreement. Like the consociational model, the incentivist model with its federalism and creation of mini states has not found favor on the continent. But the issue of incentives has been taken on board and forms the reason for extending participation in the power-sharing arrangements of all rebel and non-rebel groups.

The tri-polar model was intended by Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie (2003) to broaden the scope of power-sharing beyond the political dimension to include territorial, economic and security dimensions. These are seen as having significance equal to, or greater than, the political dimensions and that they are likely to guarantee stability.

None of the three models really provide a proper justification for the power-sharing arrangements that have been taking place on the continent. Power-sharing has, however, emerged as the preferred route of conflict resolution on the continent. There are clear challenges and limitations both in the negotiation and implementation of power-sharing arrangements that require noting here.

## **The Challenges of Power-Sharing in Africa**

It is clear, for example, that the success or failure of power-sharing arrangements is dependent on the existence of specific conditions, that is, the balance of power between the warring groups and the resources available to them. In the absence of external pressures to force the political opponents to join forces or to demonstrate their collective solidarity, negotiations for power-sharing and the implementation of the agreements reached can be difficult and tenuous.

Power-sharing arrangements are designed to achieve a set of immediate security demands in the short-term. The goal is that of negative peace; halting current fighting and limiting the risks of its return. But even these short-term goals of power-sharing at times prove difficult to achieve, both in reaching an agreement, and, even more so, in the implementation of an agreement that has been reached (Sriram and Zahar 2009, 20-21; Totolo 2009, 2-3). The difficulty in reaching an agreement stems from the fact that the conflicting parties have very different (and conflicting) interests and agendas. For example, groups that value territorial autonomy and governance of resources might not be interested in signing an agreement that offers them participation in national security forces or in parliament. This was the case with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), who had no apparent interest in being included in the security forces but clearly articulated demands for power and resource-sharing (Sriram and Zahar 2009, 22-23; Traniello 2008, 28-29).

Negotiations have frequently had to deal with 'spoilers', that is, those who are not actually interested in furthering a peace process. Some of these have the capacity and the will to resort to violence to subvert peace processes (Gates & Strom 2008, 3). This has often led to a vexing issue of who should be included or excluded from the peace process. The accommodation of potential spoilers has resulted in ever growing costs and the extension of negotiating periods, not to mention difficulties in reaching an agreement. Since funding for such negotiations is typically raised externally, periods in which negotiations had to be abandoned until sufficient funding could be raised are not uncommon.

It is one thing to reach an agreement and another to implement it. Agreements have often been violated by signatories because the incentives contained in the agreement were not important to them or they felt that they could achieve their goals through violence. In Zimbabwe, for example, in spite of the power-sharing deal between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), senior ZANU-PF officials have undermined the implementation of the power-sharing agreement reached, by using both violent and non-violent means. This included the arrest of MDC ministerial nominees along with the detention, and torture of human rights activists and MDC sympathizers.

Implementation problems have further arisen because parties have committed themselves to short-term pragmatism rather than long-term policies. Parties committing themselves to a power-sharing agreement may do so for cynical or short-term ends, and will eventually seek to obtain absolute power. This may particularly be the case if power-sharing is viewed as imported

or externally imposed. This was the case with the DPA Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) of 2006, where the conflicting parties signed the peace agreement knowing full well that the battlefield was the real strategic arena of conflict and that the negotiations were simply tactical maneuvering (Nathan 2008).

Furthermore, agreements do not dispel old patterns of mistrust and cheating. These are sometimes transported into the new partnership institutions of governance. In Sudan for instance, many of the institutions alluded to in the peace agreement to ensure implementation of specific governance incentives, such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), were not established, or were highly dysfunctional because of the existing mistrust. The end result is the revival of tensions or even conflict; which then lead to the collapse of the peace agreement (Sriram and Zahar 2009, 24-25).

Finally, the implementation of power-sharing may be difficult if not impossible in 'bad' neighborhoods. Neighboring states that have an interest in the continuation of a conflict may foster, but also have the power to destabilize, power-sharing in multiple ways. This is most probable in situations where geostrategic interests or ethnic kinship considerations draw neighboring states into the politics of the state's implementation of power-sharing agreements (Sriram and Zahar 2009, 27-28). This has been the case in the DRC where both Rwanda and Uganda had specific interests in keeping the conflict alive.

Apart from the problems with the implementation process of power-sharing arrangements, some have produced negative results, even where they had been deemed successful in ushering in a transition from war to peace. They have in some instances created states that were unable to effectively respond to governance challenges. By inserting insurgents into various levels of governance and turning warlords into government officials based on their former coercive roles, power-sharing institutions are in many instances incapable of winning public confidence and securing long-term legitimacy. Instead, they often create incentive structures for would-be-leaders, who can attempt to seize a portion of power by embarking on the insurgent path. The rebel becomes an appealing option in the pursuit of otherwise blocked political aspiration (Tull & Mehler 2005, 376; Mitchell 2012, 175). This in turn might lead to the creation of new grievances, and the risk of importing conflict behavior into weak state institutions. Power-sharing agreements at times include participants who lack the background and capacity to function properly in positions responsible for public policy (Traniello 2008, 28-29). This undermines the building of a strong and sustainable state as it places power on individuals and groups not fully committed to, or unable to take part in governance for the benefit of the entire population.

Power-sharing has further been used by incumbent governments as mechanisms for blocking reforms. This has been the case in situations where power-sharing arose out of electoral defeats of the incumbent as has been the case in Kenya and Zimbabwe (Cheeseman & Tendi 2010, 204; Mitchell 2012, 175). Incumbent governments that had refused to recognize their electoral defeat agreed to enter into unity government because it enabled them to remain in power. They believed that as long as they retained a portion of the presidential power, it would be easier for them to

‘effectively veto reform’ by not implementing the clauses of the agreements, which were most problematic for them (Cheeseman & Tendi 2010, 219). In these instances, power-sharing, rather than creating a space for reform coalitions, can be manipulated by incumbents, desperate to retain their positions in the face of electoral defeat. In this regard, not only do power-sharing arrangements freeze the war-time realities and prevent politics from evolving, but they also concentrate power in the hands of war-time elites and fail to create adequate political space for the expression of other interests (Cheeseman & Tendi 2010, 219; Mitchell 2012, 175).

Lastly, power-sharing counters the very basic principle of democracy. Whereas in a democratic regime citizens are sovereign and have electoral decisions that matter, under power-sharing arrangements, the significance of elections is limited, as the government will consist of a broad coalition of groups, regardless of the outcome of the voting (Gates & Strom 2008, 2). In post-elections crises therefore, power-sharing sets a precedent for anti-democratic behavior, as it enables authoritarian leaders to maintain the benefits of incumbency which will no doubt be wielded with added ferocity in future elections (Cheeseman & Tendi 2010, 225). As such, power-sharing seems to be a generous title for a process which has condemned opposition parties to accept inferior positions within the government, despite their success at the ballot box.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the multiple challenges arising from the negotiation and implementation of power-sharing arrangements in Africa, it has remained a dynamic and attractive option for resolving the multitude of protracted conflicts on the continent. It remains an appealing means of conflict resolution to external policymakers, even if it drastically underestimates the complexity of the conflicts and the intransigence of the respective leaderships. The short-term peace and stability that it provides is welcome. In a situation where there appears to be a general lack of mechanisms for bringing about peace, power-sharing appears to one of few viable options. It is, however, likely to succeed only where there is a genuine desire and commitment among the respective leaders towards peace, and sufficient imagination and innovation to create appropriate structures and institutions which simultaneously accommodate all groups. It must be driven by the spirit of reconciliation among the warring parties. It also calls for changes in the electoral processes dominated by a winner-takes-all political mentality and the perception of the control of the state as a prize to be won rather than as one to be shared.

Furthermore, power-sharing should be seen as a temporary measure – a transitional system that leads to a political system based on norms of trust and cooperation. The transitional period should be utilized to work out long-lasting constitutional agreements to govern the country. As a transitional process leading to elections and a new constitution, power-sharing should ideally create a political space for debate to take place outside the power-sharing arrangements in order to facilitate the emergence of new leaders and the strengthening of civil society.

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