EDITORIAL

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Like many other states in Southern Africa Lesotho has undergone a political transition from authoritarian governance, both civilian (1970-1986) and military (1986-1993), to embracing multiparty democracy (1993 to date). There is no doubt that the transition from military dictatorship to multiparty democracy was epoch-making and set the stage for a new political era for the enclave mountain kingdom.

While many keen observers of Lesotho's political scene were fascinated, excited and enthused by the positive developments of the early 1990s we remained cognisant of the stark reality that undergoing a political transition is one thing, while building a firm foundation on which democratic governance can thrive and endure is quite another. Put somewhat differently, it is relatively easier to jettison an autocratic mode of governance and embrace multiparty democracy than it is to build, nurture, and consolidate democratic governance beyond mere procedural (elections) and legal (constitution and legislation) considerations.

While it is incontrovertible that Lesotho underwent a successful transition in the early 1990s, what is arguable is whether or not the transition has led to the institutionalisation and consolidation of democracy. Is multiparty democracy advancing political rights and civil liberties? Is it advancing socio-economic rights and improving the daily lives of ordinary people? Is it ensuring peace, harmony, and political stability? Do elections bolster or hinder the building, nurturing, and consolidation of representative democratic governance? These are the key questions that prompted EISA to commission the papers that constitute this special issue of the *Journal of African Elections*.

Many of these papers were presented at a regional dialogue forum organised by EISA and the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations from 25-27 September 2007 under the title 'Lesotho's 2007 General Elections: Towards a Constructive Management of Post-Election Disputes'.

While the principal preoccupation of the contributors to this issue is the 2007 general election, their larger and broader concern is to review critically Lesotho's political transition since 1993 and explore the challenges of institutionalising a representative multiparty democracy that ensures the political and socio-economic rights and civil liberties of the Basotho people; a democracy that improves the daily lives of ordinary Basotho in the villages and not a democracy of urban-based elites; a democracy that ensures peace, harmony, and political stability after decades of conflict-ridden autocratic governance; and a governance system in which elections advance democratic culture and practice beyond mere procedural and legal forms. The issue explores various themes,

chief among which are elections, democracy, conflict management, political stability, and sustainable human development. Lesotho faces enormous challenges in these areas.

ELECTIONS

Elections are a key ingredient of democracy (Elklit 2001, 2007; Elklit & Reynolds 2005; Lindberg 2006). According to Steffan Lindberg (2006, p 1) 'every modern definition of representative democracy includes participatory and contested elections perceived as the legitimate procedure for translation of rule by the people into workable executive and legislative power'. Thus, while an election has its own intrinsic value (citizen's choice of leadership) it also has an instrumental value, namely to build, nurture, and consolidate democratic governance, peace, and political stability. This means that an election for election's sake is an exercise in futility. An election should not be an end in itself; it must be a means to an end – the movement of society towards a more open and pluralistic politics that allows citizens to participate in the choice of their leaders and the governance of national affairs.

If elections do not contribute effectively to democratic transformation they become mere ceremonial rituals used to camouflage illiberal democracies and authoritarian governance. In a recent seminal work Sørensen (2008) reminds us that not all elections have led to democratic governance as some African countries have tended to vacillate between democratic 'transition' and 'stand-still' while others have witnessed democratic 'reversals'. A majority of African countries have been characterised by democratic stand-still and, according to Sørensen (2008, p 65), 'most of these countries are not on the way to more democracy and will probably remain in the gray zone'.

It is the regimes in the 'gray zone' that Fareed Zakaria (cited in Engberg & Ersson 2001) refers to as illiberal democracies, that is, regimes that exhibit democratic tendencies but hide under the guise of democracy a deep-seated authoritarian mode of governance. Some of the characteristic features of illiberalism include vote-buying, legal fine-tuning, ethnic affirmative action, emergency laws, and restrictions on the right to organise, debate, and voice opinions (Engberg & Ersson 2001, p 36).

Lesotho has held elections regularly every five years since the 1993 transition – in 1998, 2002 and 2007. This is a commendable record and a trend towards democratisation. However, it must be questioned whether this regularity is adequate for democracy to advance or whether, in fact, the focus should be on transcending quantity and emphasising quality. The fact is that it is not the frequency of the elections that matters, it is the quality – they must advance

substantive democracy rather than reduce democracy to mere electoralism, with people mobilised to participate and later demobilised, leaving the task of governance to power elites with weak or no links to the people. The participation of the people in governance must be sustained both during and between elections if democracy is to be truly representative and participative. If all the stakeholders, especially the government, do not give adequate attention to improving the quality of elections in terms of their value to governance Lesotho's electoral democracy is likely to slide into an illiberal democracy.

DEMOCRACY

Although a great deal of debate has revolved around its theory and practice there is no clear-cut agreement on exactly what constitutes democracy. For our purposes the term is defined as a form of governance in which people rule through their elected representatives. It is premised upon the key principles of competition, political participation, promotion of civil liberties, and the political, social, and economic rights of the people organised according to the principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, popular consultation and majority rule (Ranney 2001, p 95).

The principle of popular sovereignty requires that decision-making powers be vested in all the people rather than in a small coterie of the power elite whose self-serving interests do not always coincide with those of the masses. The principle of political equality requires that all adult citizens have the same opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. It is the embodiment of 'one-person-one-vote'. Popular consultation has two main elements, namely the existence of institutional machinery through which public officials learn what policies the people wish to be adopted and enforced by the leaders and, having ascertained what these preferences are, puts them into effect.

The principle of majority rule implies that when people disagree on an issue the government should act according to the wishes of the majority rather than the minority. People must be consulted on various issues from time to time through direct democratic mechanisms such as referenda, public consultative meetings (*lipitso*) and recall measures. Although democracy clearly has its own intrinsic value it should also have an instrumental value. Simply put, democracy for democracy's sake, while desirable, may be an exercise in futility. Democracy should not be an end in and of itself, it must be a means to en end, that end being the promotion of sustainable human development.

With the above definition in mind three forms of democracy can be identified world-wide, namely, electoral democracy, liberal democracy, and social democracy. Electoral democracy is that form of governance that emphasises the holding

of elections on a regular basis, thus providing for popular participation. It is the most minimalist, the narrowest, and the shallowest form of democracy. Liberal democracy embraces electoral democracy by allowing competition and participation and extends to the promotion and protection of political rights and civil liberties. It is a relatively advanced form of democratic governance compared to electoral democracy, although, in many instances, it still falls short of protecting and promoting socio-economic rights.

Social democracy transcends both the electoral and liberal democratic models and aims to transform society fundamentally in the direction of social welfare, people-centred development and socio-economic justice. It is the deepest and widest form of democracy, combining intrinsic with instrumental value. It compels states to uphold democratic principles such as elections and accountable government but also to deliver sustainable development, including the provision of social welfare programmes such as health, education, housing, employment, environmental security, and so on. While a majority of African democracies qualify as electoral democracies, few are fully-fledged liberal democracies and none as yet qualifies as a social democracy.

Lesotho's experience since the 1993 transitional elections shows that the country has the potential to leapfrog to liberal democracy but also faces challenges that could reverse the democratic gains, turning into an illiberal democracy (a hybrid regime that exhibits democratic tendencies but is, in practice, essentially an authoritarian state). It is incumbent upon all the stakeholders, especially the political elite, to safeguard the country's nascent democracy and deepen its roots and foundations while at the same time guarding against a possible reversion either to illiberal democracy or to outright autocracy.

CONFLICT

Democracy is a fundamental prerequisite for development and stability while authoritarianism breeds underdevelopment and instability. There is no doubt that one of the major explanations for the state of development, and peace in Africa today, barring external factors, relates to the extent to which the continent has embraced and institutionalised democracy since political independence in the 1960s (Ake 1996, 2000).

A majority of African states embraced authoritarian rule after the departure of the colonial oligarchies, which, themselves, had entrenched autocratic and conflict-prone governance regimes during the heyday of colonialism. In post-colonial Africa, particularly between the 1960s and 1980s, the period regarded by the United Nations as two lost decades, mono-party, one-person, theocratic, monarchic or military rule played their role in the under-development and

instability on the continent. The experiences of these two decades demonstrate vividly that without democracy and peace people-centred development can neither be realised nor sustained.

Development and peace themselves cannot be achieved in conditions of conflict (especially violent conflict) which, in turn, generates political instability. It also goes without saying that political instability does not serve democracy. Put somewhat differently, sustainable people-centred development requires a democratic setting and both democracy and development require political stability within an environment in which effective mechanisms exist for the constructive management of conflict.

In an encouraging and indeed bold move the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) adopted the 'Declaration on the Framework for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes in Governments' during the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Lomé, Togo, in July 2000. The declaration commits member states to preventing military coups and unconstitutional regime changes and safeguarding democratic governance. Within the framework of the declaration an unconstitutional change of government is perceived as:

- a military coup against a democratically elected government;
- intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government;
- the replacement of a democratically elected government with armed dissidents and rebels; and/or
- the refusal of an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party after free, fair, and regular elections.

The above commitments have been further reinforced by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance adopted by the African Union (AU) during its Summit of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2007.

As the countries of Africa gear up to ratify and apply this charter it is worth pointing out that signing declarations on democratic governance is one thing, transforming societies along the principles espoused in these declarations is quite another. Lesotho has not yet signed the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance despite the fact the Lesotho government hosted the Southern African regional workshop in December 2007 organised by the AU's department of political affairs and aimed at popularising the charter and imploring states to ratify and apply it.

At the risk of repetition it is worth emphasising that since the start of the democratisation process the Kingdom of Lesotho has held regular multiparty

elections – four general elections (1993, 1998, 2002 and 2007) and one local government election (2005). The first two general elections were held on the basis of the constituency-based first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. The second two were held on the basis of the mixed member proportional (MMP) system, which combines the FPTP and the party-list proportional representation systems.

The MMP was adopted in 2001 as a conflict-management mechanism following violent conflict in the immediate aftermath of the 1998 general election. Almost all general elections in Lesotho since independence in 1966 had been marked by post-election conflict, which tended to destabilise the country's political system, undermining democracy and stifling socio-economic development.

The transition to a multiparty dispensation in 1993 did not resolve the problem of election-related conflict. The problem was not that the elections themselves were conflict-ridden, it was that post-election conflicts turned violent, with devastating consequences for democratisation, political stability, and long-term socio-economic development.

A related problem is that election-related conflicts are often not resolved speedily, as local efforts to manage them often fail, leading to dependence on external conflict-resolution efforts. They may also not be effectively managed if there is no culture of political tolerance. One way in which tolerance is ensured during elections is through the development of and adherence to an electoral code of conduct binding political stakeholders to agreed norms and principles throughout all the stages of the electoral process.

The failure of local efforts to resolve post-election disputes related to the 2007 general elections, particularly those concerning alliance formations and the allocation of parliamentary seats, led to the intervention of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). A mediation process facilitated by the SADC Eminent Person, Sir Ketumile Masire (former president of the Republic of Botswana), has been underway since June 2007. The Terms of Reference of the Eminent Person Mission are to:

- hold consultative meetings with all relevant stakeholders;
- develop a structured plan for the dialogue;
- initiate dialogue between the ruling party, opposition parties and other relevant stakeholders;
- facilitate the dialogue process; and
- compile a report of the dialogue process for submission to the chairperson of the Organ for Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation and for presentation to the Government of Lesotho and other stakeholders.

This dialogue process was a building block in the process of amicably resolving the post-election political impasse and forging a way forward in terms of pre-empting and averting similar conflicts in the future.

DEVELOPMENT

The concept of development, like the notion of democracy, is nebulous and has been defined by various authorities in different ways, some perceiving it merely as simple economic growth. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Rostovian notion of 'stages of economic growth' became both influential and popular in the development discourse of the 1950s and 1960s.

However, in the 1970s and early 1980s there was a dramatic shift in development thinking towards dependency theory, which posited that underdevelopment in Africa was basically the result of exploitation and domination by industrialised countries and the solution was to sever links between these countries and the continent, a solution referred to by renowned African development theorist Samir Amin as de-linkage.

Interestingly, the 1970s and 1980s also coincided with the popularisation of social welfarist development strategies, particularly within the UN system, hence the focus of development discourse on the poor and on the eradication of poverty. However, a major reversal in development thinking and practice came with the onset of the World Bank and IMF economic adjustment policies of the last two decades of the 20th century. This new development strategy was a glaring reversal of the statist developmental paradigm of the 1960s-1970s (or *dirigisme*) in favour of market fundamentalism (or *free enterprise*).

In the IMF/World Bank's scheme of things states would retreat (roll back) and market forces would take centre stage to drive the development agenda and bring benefits to the ordinary people (the trickle-down effect). However, this was not to be, for states and markets cannot be perceived as polar opposites in the development process. Not only did the economic adjustment policies fail dismally to improve the economic condition of the African continent, the same policies encouraged and bolstered authoritarian regimes and triggered considerable political instability.

With hindsight, it is incontrovertible now that the riots that took place in a number of African countries in the 1970s and 1980s were the result of the IMF's policies and that these riots were followed by intensified authoritarian rule aimed at enforcing painful economic adjustment through painful political measures – a fine recipe for political instability related to deteriorating socio-economic conditions.

Since the 1990s the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has

promoted a far more realistic notion of sustainable human development (SHD), which is a departure from the market-based economic adjustment programmes aimed at making development more people-centred. In order to deepen SHD the UNDP is currently pioneering the achievement of millennium development goals (MDGs).

This brief survey of the shifts and twists in development theory and practice in Africa suggests that development is always in a state of flux, as is democratic governance. The challenge for both policy-makers and the academic community is thus to find correlations and causal links between democracy and development, with a view to providing prudent policy advice to policy-makers for the good of the continent.

Currently African leaders are pursuing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and the key challenge is how exactly this new initiative will assist the continent to consolidate democratic governance and achieve sustainable development. While Nepad may be perceived as a visionary development programme for the continent, its benefits are bound to be directly or indirectly tempered by the advances the continent makes in the governance realm through the implementation, for instance, of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which is due to be implemented in some five countries on various parts of the continent.

Lesotho's development trajectory is currently informed by the disjointed commitment of the political elite to, on the one hand, poverty reduction (which is essentially an IMF/World Bank programme) and, on the other, the pursuance of sustainable human development combined with commitment towards achieving millennium development goals (both UNDP programmes). It is not clear how the two programmes are coordinated and synergised let alone what impact they are making on the lives of ordinary people. It seems that many of these programmes are adopted by the political elite largely to access international resources such as aid, trade, and foreign direct investment. They therefore become part and parcel of foreign-policy outreach for the mobilisation of international resources. This situation is compounded by incessant conflicts, most of them the result of elections, which tend to reverse any advances towards sustainable human development.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

This editorial sets the scene for the substantive discussion of various issues that have had either a direct or an indirect impact on progress and the challenges confronting democratic governance in Lesotho since the democratic transition of 1993. While the contributions of the various authors provide details about each subject addressed in this special issue, the editorial has deliberately cast the net

wider, giving a broader view of the landscape within which democracy and elections are currently evolving in Lesotho.

The discussion revolves around four distinct, albeit intertwined, governance challenges, namely elections, democracy, conflict, and development. The principal argument and analytic thrust of this introductory section is that elections alone do not make democracy, especially if they are violently disputed. Participation, a critical element of democracy, cannot be reduced merely to voting in elections. A system which does not allow sufficient citizen participation in the governance process between elections suffers from the 'fallacy of electoralism', that is, the erroneous equation of elections with democracy. Elections can either resolve or induce conflict and political elites and other key stakeholders must strive towards elections that promote democracy, peace, and political stability.

In the final analysis democracy must promote development. Without meaningful development and positive change in the social wellbeing of the ordinary Basotho, democracy becomes meaningless. Without peace, Lesotho may not achieve sustainable development and without democracy and development, political stability may remain a tantalising mirage.

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