

The Challenges Facing Democratic Consolidation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

Certainly, African countries are a long way from the predominance of cross-cutting cleavages and civic virtue that characterize such a civic community at any national level. This predominance would demand a transformation of political culture and an enormous accumulation of social capital in the form of these cross-cutting, civically engaged organizations. Nevertheless, in Africa, especially in the DRC, a potentially historic and profound process of change is underway. If this trend is nurtured, through the types of institutional reforms and external assistance, it could put a number of African countries firmly on the path to democracy, development, and political stability. And this success story would become a model for other countries, as they have in Asia and Latin America. Here lies the necessity for research on “challenges to democratic consolidation “as Africa countries stumble on this long road to democratization and consolidation.

Using mainly secondary sources and general observation method, the paper examines the challenges facing the democratic consolidation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and will recommend solutions.

Key words: Democracy, Election, Government, Peace, Politics

Introduction

It's been ages after major political forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo agreed to a programme to end years of dictatorship and civil strife and work towards democratic dispensation, the country is still struggling to distance itself from the “state-in-transition” label. As suggested by the political crisis that accompanied the November 2011 presidential and parliamentary elections, the process of political renewal to which the DRC's leadership

committed itself in 2002 failed to progress beyond the initial phases with a real possibility of regression. After holding two general elections, the DRC's governance institutions and dominant political culture demonstrate little progress in the way of the expected democratic transition.

The socio-economic welfare of the majority of the people in the mineral –rich country also shows no signs of improvement, while recurrent armed attacks and insecurity in the eastern half of the country bring into sharp relief the continued threat of a general relapse into violence.

This paper is divided into four sections the first section focus on conceptual Clarification of the Concept Democratic Consolidation Second section examines the challenges of Democratic Consolidation in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the third section offers recommendation; final section summarizes the conclusion.

Conceptual Clarification

Democratization is a crucial element of post-conflict peace building in the Democratic Republic of Congo. However democratization is the process of gradually introducing more participatory politics, including elections and the creation of a civil society supportive of tolerant pluralistic politics through adherence to the constitutionally enshrined rules of the game (Sisk, 2001). Democratization involves bringing about the end of an undemocratic régime, the inauguration of a democratic régime, and then the consolidation of a democratic system. A democratic transition therefore is one phase in a process of change from one state to another along a democracy continuum. Post conflict transitions usually manifest through various phases and the risks of reversal to violence or autocracy, and /or shift to anocracy remain for long periods.

Democratic Consolidation on the other describes the challenges of making new democracies secure, expectancy beyond the short-term, protecting them against regression to authoritarian governance, and building dams against eventual “reverse waves” (Schedler 1998:91). The generic tasks of

consolidation include democratic deepening, political institutionalization and regime performance. A democracy is consolidated when it is made stable, vibrant, efficient and accountable. For that reason, the process is complex and iterative and takes into account the national conditions which often rely upon power sharing (Mindzie, 2009).

Effective democratic Consolidation necessitates three fundamentals, viz a) commitment among the elites to democracy, upholding of democratic principles and behaving in accordance with democratic norms; b) Firm rooted belief at the public level that democracy is the best form of government; and, c) Firm commitment to democracy by non-state actors in strengthening and deepening democracy.

O' Donnell further identified six minimal requirements for democratic consolidation, namely: free and fair elections, universal suffrage and the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information and freedom of association.¹

The Challenge of Democratic Consolidation

The challenges of democratic consolidation in the DRC cannot be dissociated from the country's long history of authoritarian rule. This entrenched a political culture and molded a political class that has succeeded in outliving that epoch. Mobutu's patrimonial rule after 1965 evolved under a political leadership which neither shared a common vision nor was able to articulate a substantive political agenda for its development. This allowed the individual interests and aspirations of the ruling class to define the political game, while corruption opportunism and materialism flourished. The line between Mobutu's government and those who opposed it was largely blurred in terms of the extent to which the conduct of Congolese elite reflected the dominant political culture.

The following section outlines following challenges to democratic consolidation in the DRC, Viz. The regional cross-border instability, Economic

Impact, External Dimension, , The Consequence of a dejected electorate and splintered civil society, Corruption.

The Regional Cross-border Instability

The problem of regional dynamics continues to have an effect on the DRC. Not only has the central Africa region never had an established democracy, but also most of the region's countries (Uganda, Sudan and Central Africa Republic) are critically weak states and therefore exert a 'spill-over effect which retards democratic consolidation in the DRC. The limited capacity of these governments to effectively control substantial portions of their territory, combined with perennial intrastate conflicts with large flow of refugees and internal displacement, creating immense challenges for democratic change in the DRC. Evidences includes widespread and in abated violence abductions (for forced labour and sex), and wanton disregard of the country's institutions by both rebels and state security agents in the northern territories of Goma, Gbadolite, Muhanga and Kisangani in the Kivu and Ituri. However cross – border phenomenon is congruent with many analyst' assertions that conflicts in the post-1990 era became contagious with outbreaks of violence in one place leading to broader crises which affect ever –growing numbers of people and are increasing difficult to resolve (Whittaker,2003).

Economic Impact

Foreign business houses have shortened due to an uncertain atmosphere, lack of infrastructure, and a non favorable and complicated work environment. There has been an increase in unemployment. A country rich in natural resources has become one of the least developed countries. The infrastructure in terms of road density, electrification and water supply remains poor. The country is the world's largest producer of cobalt, and a major producer of copper and diamond however the resources of the country have been a curse and brought misery for the natives and all the benefits have gone to the outsiders.

Resources have been used to fuel conflict and not to get people out of poverty. In 2011, the Human Development Index ranked the country at 187 positions out of a total of 185 countries.

The unsteady situation gave ground to the stakeholders to exploit the natural wealth of DRC with impunity. As Reyntjens wrote, “Entrepreneurs of insecurity are engaged in extractive activities that would be impossible in a stable state environment. The criminalization context in which these activities occur offers avenues for factional and personal enrichment through the trafficking of arms, illegal drugs, toxic products, mineral resources and dirty money”. A United Nations report published in April 2001 clearly pointed that all the parties involved in the conflict profited by looting resources of DRC. On the whole the situation remains fragile and poverty is all pervasive. The words of Jan Egeland, the then United Nations Under-Secretary for humanitarian are worth quoting:” there are few places on earth where the gap between humanitarian needs and available resources is as large –or as lethal –as in Congo”. The DRC is emerging from a decade of political instability and violent conflict that has led to the near-collapse of the economy, and caused the annual per capita income to plummet to \$120 in 2005 (down from \$380 in 1985). Experts described this as ‘development in reverse’. The country has the second largest swath of rainforests in the world, 86 million hectares of area covered by rainforests, the DRC accounts for over of the total remaining rainforests in the Central Africa region. Congolese forests are a vital resource, both for the Congolese people and the global environment. About 40 million rural Congolese depend on the forests for their food, income, energy, shelter, and cultural needs. Described as the ‘second lung’ of the planet for their ability to store carbon dioxide on a global scale, these Congolese forests too have been threatened by widespread poverty and instability in the region.

The External Dimension

The international community did play a crucial role in laying the foundation for democratic institutions in the DRC, most notably through its facilitation of the ICD and its support for the transitional period that culminated in the 2006 elections. However, official external support for the democratisation process in the DRC has waned over the years. In the context of the geo-strategic importance of the DRC and the abundance of highly sought after natural and mineral resources within its borders, national interest considerations have turned out to be the primary motivation behind the involvement of leading global and regional powers in the DRC, overshadowing concerns about political reform in the country and in some instances encouraging anti-democratic tendencies in the system.

No doubt, the DRC received considerable financial and technical assistance from its traditional partners such as the US, France and Belgium, which is directed towards building state capacity and strengthening the country's institutions of governance. New partners like South Africa, China and Angola have also been very important contributors to post-conflict reconstruction efforts in the DRC. However, as Theodore Trefon argues in his analysis of the relationship between foreign aid and political reform in the DRC, there has been little political energy or commitment from the capitals of these countries to align support for post-conflict reconstruction with the democratic aspirations of the Congolese people.²

This tendency remains disadvantageous to democratisation efforts in the DRC on at least two fronts. Firstly, by staying indifferent to the lack of progress in democratic reform in the DRC, as exemplified in the timid international response to the controversial 2011 elections, while at the same time providing financial and technical support to the government in Kinshasa, the DRC's external partners are tacitly endorsing and emboldening the Congolese political leadership in its anti-democratic disposition. Secondly, some forms of technical and economic cooperation with the DRC tend to have the unintended effect of perpetuating the corrupt and repressive culture inherent in the system. Such is the case with the security assistance provided

by South Africa and Angola as elements of the DRC's police force trained by them are believed to form part of Kabila's security apparatus used to violently suppress opposition protests. The same could be said of some of the investment decisions of other partners such as China and the European Union, which have been criticized for reinforcing the web of corrupt links between foreign business and political patronage in the DRC.³

The Consequence of a Dejected Electorate and Splintered Civil Society

The inheritance of long years of rapacious rule and armed conflict, attached with the disenchantment from what many see as unproductive transition, has had devastating effects on the capacity and will of the majority of the Congolese citizenry to develop and optimally exercise a democratic agency. Any promising democracy needs an engaged citizenry to nurture it and guarantee its survival. This is more so in a country such as the DRC where, as argued above, the democratic discourse among the political class appears to be merely a smoke screen for promoting personal agendas. However, for most Congolese, the crucial to survive in a society of chronic poverty and very few economic opportunities is a sufficient disincentive to become actively engaged in political processes, which are seen only to reproduce the status quo. The highly discredited November 2011 polls, which were embraced by some as a window of opportunity to break the cycle of bad governance, can only have the effect of reinforcing this despondency and the tendency towards political compliance, giving the political elite a free reign in undermining the democratic agenda.

Among certain segments of the population, the feeling of hopelessness and betrayal manifests itself not in political apathy, but in a very active, albeit anti-democratic involvement in political processes. This is the case with a good number of the Congolese youth, whose political agency, like that of the political elite, is for the most part conditioned by the struggle to chart, by any means possible, an alternative path to a life of poverty, unemployment and

general despair. For this class of citizens, political participation is not a struggle to engender democratic governance, but a strategy to extract short-term financial and material benefits from politicians who rely on violence, intimidation and fraud to win elections.

Perhaps more disadvantageous to the cause of democracy is the effect of this growing state of hopelessness on the integrity and operational capacity of civil society in the DRC. Although the DRC has one of the most crowded civil society spaces in Africa, only a negligible number of civil society groups are truly committed to the cause of political transformation in the country. Similar to political parties, most civil society groups in the DRC owe their origins to the crafty attempt to escape the deprivation associated with the country's dire socio-economic conditions, a practice that seems to have been institutionalized by the ICD⁴. Consequently, the same culture of opportunism and self-seeking that defines politics in the DRC is also reflected in the operations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media and other sections of the civil society. Given the tendency of Congolese civil society groups to align themselves with specific political platforms, civil society is not only seen to lack integrity, autonomy and initiative, but is also devoid of the capacity to operate in a concerted and coordinated manner to fulfill its role as the bastion of democracy.

Corruption

Corruption has been variously defined. According to **Transparency International** (TI), "corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for private gains". TI went further to differentiate between "**according to the rule**" corruption and "**against the rule**" corruption. Facilitation of payments; where a bribe is paid to receive preferential treatment for something that the bribe receiver is required to do by law, constitutes the former. The latter on the other hand is a bribe paid to obtain services the bribe receiver is prohibited from providing.

Some researchers have defined corruption to be related only to bribery and unlawful payments, **Grunner** (1999:7), but **Ojaide** (2000:18), defines corruption as “any systematic vice in an individual, society or a nation which reflects favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment or amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power position and derivation of undue gains and benefits. Corruption also includes bribery, smuggling, and fraud, illegal payments, money laundering, drug trafficking, falsification of documents and records, window dressing, false declaration, tax evasion of any kind to the detriment of another person, community society or nation. Robert Calderisi, former World Bank official with vast experience in Africa trenchantly observed that the world’s great gift to Africa’s democracy would be to stop the amassing of illegal fortunes by its politicians and senior officials in foreign banks. ⁵

Corruption continues to undermine the political and economic development of the Democratic Republic of Congo. One has observed the continued abuse of public office for personal gain from minor civil servants to the highest members of government. This has created a political and administrative culture wherein the theft of government funds is seen as normal, even praiseworthy; civil servants boast amongst each other of their achievements in thievery! The culture survived Mobutu Sese Seko and is still causing havoc in the economy today. According to the corruption perceptions index 2012, the DRC is ranked 160 out of 176 Countries making it one of the most corrupt countries in the world.⁶ There is an Ethics and Anti Corruption Commission but it has little real impact and lacks resources, independence and credibility. Political actors have continued to manipulate the administration, customs service, army and control of natural resources to embezzle funds. This in turn has perpetuated a system of governance which is largely predatory with the state living off the citizenry and the country’s resources without providing even the most rudimentary social services. This has undercut the state’s capacity to collect revenues or use them for salaries or social services. The

Congo has one of Africa's weakest collection capacities with revenues (excluding aid) amounting to just over 10% of GDP, compared to some 13% for Rwanda and Tanzania and 18% for Kenya. ⁷

Hundreds of millions of potential tax dollars are embezzled; a quarter of the national budget is not properly accounted for. Millions of dollars is misappropriated in the army and state-run companies. The mining Sector is particular prone to corruption with valuable concessions granted with little legitimate benefit to humanitarian situations. Unpaid soldiers have continued to harass and intimidate civilians. Factions within the army and government continue to fight over mines and control of border crossings.

The displaced civilians have almost no health services to fall back on, and 1,000 or more die daily as a result. Donor agencies have continue to treat corruption as a technical problem and lay more emphasis on data management systems, training programs and laws. They have shied away from systems, training programmes and laws. They have continued to avoid the more political aspects, such as strengthening parliament, courts and anti-corruption and auditing bodies. They finance more than half the national budget and should do more to press charges against corruption suspects.

Corruption is now part and parcel of the culture in the DRC and continues to threaten both constitutional democracy and nation. Congolese stolen resources have found their way to foreign countries, either stashed in private bank accounts or used to purchase mansions in choice neighborhoods. Corruption distorts governance provides perverse incentives for dysfunctional behavior and ultimately diminishes the quality of life by diverting funds for social services into private pockets. President Barack Obama (then Senator) perceptively observed during his 2006 visit to Kenya that "corruption erodes the state from the inside out, sickening the justice system until there is no justice to be found, poisoning the police forces until their presence becomes a source of insecurity rather than a source of security"⁸. It has also set the

wrong example for citizens and undermines public confidence in the democratic process. Majority of those officials who loot the treasury use their ill-gotten wealth to fund and arm militias to compete for legitimacy with the state. This has overwhelmed the idea of public service and turned public institutions into crucibles of sloth, avarice and mediocrity.

Recommendation

The challenges of democratic consolidation are grave and should be addressed by all in order to provide solutions for its effectiveness and efficiency. However just as knowledge of the possible cause of a disease will assist a medical General Practitioner to give the adequate prescription for the prevention and curing of such disease, similarly it will be possible to recommend the following curative measures that will assist the Democratic Republic of Congo's Government. Therefore;

The problem of governance cannot be solved with voting alone. Without security and stability, the devastating effects of the conflict will not ease. If corruption is not reduced, the economy will not thrive and the country's resources will not benefit the entire population. Without means to retain food or receive medical care, health indicators will not improve. It is of interest to note the interconnectivity. Without a successful peace building process in the DRC, there is a possibility that the Great lakes region could be destabilized again in the future. The DRC's post conflict reconstruction should entail reconciliation, restorative justice, respect for the rule of law, consolidation of democracy security sector reforms and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

There needs to be a clear partnership between the international community and the Congolese government on security sector reform which adds a political dimension to the current technical approach. Criteria should be set to measure progress and conditionality should be determined. The Congolese

government must be able to connect development aid and democratic governance. With the major role played by donors in the Congo, they should use their financial and political leverage to support the process of building democratic institutions and seek to engage the country's new Asian partners in this strategy who would benefit equally from a more stable and affective regime with which to cooperate and do business.

The international community can assist in keeping reform and democratic consolidation moving forward if sensitivity is shown towards its current leaders. War criminals must be prosecuted, but the DRC should be allowed to play a substantial role in the process, and international officials must recognize that it takes considerable time and political skill for any society to disassociate itself from its past. Such a disassociation cannot simply be externally engineered if it is to really matter for the consolidation of democracy over the long run.

It is of vital importance to institutionalize the fight against corruption. An anti corruption strategy based on civil society's effort and other post conflict countries experience should be elaborated and implementation by newly created independent agencies.

Conclusion

The paper has made attempt to outline a combination of variables that affect democratic consolidation in the DRC that include ,but are not limited to the long history of instability, an incapacitated government ,widespread poverty, political factionalism and ethnic conflicts,geography and regional dynamics. Indeed, in affirmation with Rene Lemerchard's analysis, "When the state no longer has capacity to protect the lives of its citizens, when the security forces unravel under the weight of factional rivalries, when the judicial system collapses, and when the civil service becomes a seed bed of corruption, the prospects for democratic consolidation and peace through power sharing are

all the more problematic “(Lemerchard, 2006:17). The Democratic Republic of Congo government must be able to address the issue of peace and security in the Great Lakes Region. However the Congolese people are not asking for the impossible. For one thing, development can be permanent if there is security for the entire nation. For another if the country’s natural resources are utilized effectively it will improve the economy and lessen the strain among her citizens. Given the seemingly intractable character of the Congo crisis, it will take political will and a sense of patriotism to resolve it.

There has to be a ground breaking effort to build regional cohesion, peace, prosperity and stability and development, not just for Democratic republic of Congo but the entire Great Lakes region.

Endnotes

1 O’ Donnell draws from Robert Dahl’s notion of polyarchy to outline a useful set of guidelines for democratic consolidation see O’Donnell., *illusions about consolidation* ,in *Journal of democracy* 7 (2) (1996),p.32-46.see also Dahl,R *Polyarchy:Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press,1971)

2 Trefon, Theodore, 2011, *Congo Masquerade: The Political Culture of Aid inefficiency and Reform Failure*.London.Zed Books

3 See Michael Deibert “EU involvement in DRC mining Project draws protest”,*inter press Service* ,28 October 2008, available at <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=44467> [Accessed 15 May 2012). See also “China and Congo:Friends in Need” *Global Witness* ,March 2011,available at <http://www.globalwitness.org/sites/default/files/library/ftfriends-in-nedd-en-pdf> [Accessed 15 May 2012]

4 See Whitman, Shelley,” *Balancing Act: An insider’s view of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue*”, *African Security Review*, Vol.12, no.4, 2003. See also Kabemba, Claude,”*Perspective on the role of key stakeholders in the DRC transition*”, *ISA Occasional paper no.26*, November 2004, pp8-10.

5 Robert Calderisi describing the role the effect of corruption on infrastructure in many African countries has fallen into disrepair, currencies have depreciated and real prices have inflated dramatically, while job availability, health care, education standards and life expectancy have declined.

6 According to the *Corruption index of 2012 of Transparency International*

7 The ratio of revenue to GDP is often used as a measure of state capacity and legitimacy. Figures at WWW.imf.org In addition to poor revenue collection much of the Congolese economy in the informal sector despite mineral riches official GDP per capital in the Congo is half that of Rwanda or Kenya

8 President Barack Obama then Senator in 2006 observed that Africa's problem lies with bad governance and its ability of not being accountable to her population.

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