

# Preaching Water, Drinking Wine?

## Political Parties and Intra-Party Democracy in East Africa: Considerations for Democratic Consolidation

Josh Maiyo

### *Abstract*

Political parties are essential institutions for the proper functioning of a democratic society and perform important functions for the promotion of democracy by mobilizing citizens and linking them to government. In order to effectively carry out these functions, political parties are expected to incorporate these ideals in their own internal processes and functioning. Intra-party democracy, as an element of participatory democracy, is widely perceived as necessary for the development of a democratic culture in the wider society. The attainment of these democratic ideals depends on the extent to which processes of effective membership participation are formally stipulated in the organisational rules and practically implemented in political party processes. This paper examines the state of internal party democracy among political parties in East Africa. It seeks to expand existing knowledge on intra-party democracy in Africa with specific reference to how processes of institutionalisation, inclusiveness and (de)centralisation influence levels of participatory democracy among political parties in the region. While debate continues on exactly how much democracy is good for political party effectiveness, the consensus is that intra-party democracy is desirable for its role in increasing the levels of participatory democracy in the wider society. The discussion draws on theories and normative approaches to intra-party democracy developed largely from studies of political parties in western democracies. International democracy assistance programmes use these models to propose that political party reform processes have to include aspects related to the internal organisation such as intra-party democracy (NIMD 2004). This paper seeks to determine if and to what extent these models are adequate for the study and analysis of African political parties and party systems. It concludes that whereas intra-party democracy is a desirable ideal, African political parties are products of distinct socio-economic and historical circumstances to which existing models do not fit wholly and need to be reviewed.<sup>1</sup>

**Key Words:** *Political Parties, intra-party democracy*

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## Introduction

Political parties perform certain crucial democratic functions in the wider society which include augmenting citizen participation in the political processes, widening aggregation of diverse political interests, facilitating orderly and democratic transfer of political power, promoting government accountability, and imparting legitimacy to the political system (Matlosa 2005). In Africa, political parties also serve as channels of resource distribution, patronage, upward mobility and expressions of indigenous and ethnic aspirations.

It is generally accepted that political parties cannot fulfil their democratic functions if they themselves are not democratic in the conduct of their internal affairs and how they present themselves to the electorate. These assumptions depict intra-party democracy as essential for the creation and growth of well functioning and sustainable democratic institutions: Firstly, that it encourages a culture of democratic debate and deliberation of critical issues and therefore collective ownership of decisions. Secondly, that it promotes party unity through reduced factionalism and/or fragmentation. Thirdly, that it creates legitimate internal conflict management systems and fourthly, that it reduces opportunistic and arbitrary use of delegated authority.

Intra-party democracy is therefore perceived as a desirable ideal for political parties and is essential for the creation and growth of well functioning and sustainable democratic institutions. Correlations are also made between increased intra-party democracy and more party effectiveness and subsequent electoral success on the one hand, and the strengthening of democratic culture in the wider society on the other (Scarrow 2005). Internal democracy is therefore indispensable if political parties are to fulfil their role as legitimate and credible agents of democratisation. The extent to which political parties can attain intra-party democracy depends on the extent to which processes of effective membership participation are formally stipulated and practically implemented in the party's organisational rules and procedures. When there is ineffective enforcement, or complete absence of such rules, the party may be faced with significant institutional and operational challenges.

The enormity of the challenge facing African political parties is compounded by the fact that unlike the majority of their western counterparts almost all African nation states (with the exception of countries such as Somalia) distinctive cultural or ethno-linguistic homogeneity. They are highly heterogeneous along ethnic, regional, religious or clan cleavages. They are therefore highly fractious and political competition and organisation tends to follow these pre-existing fault lines, which in turn determine the structure of political parties. Compared to their European counterparts, African political parties are products of distinct historical, socio-economic and political conditions that influence their identity, organisational structures and functions different from those prevailing in western democracies.

Manning (2005:718) characterises African parties as 'not [being] organically linked to any particular organized social group, and so have often resorted to mobilizing people along the issues that are ready to hand – ethnicity, opposition to structural economic reform – without regard for the long-term consequences'. The majority of African political parties are therefore characterised by weak organisational strength and lack of institutional capacity, their decision making processes are unstructured and power is often personalised in the party leader and a few of his cronies who are usually wealthy enough to bankroll the party (NIMD 2004, Wanjohi 2003). The role of the party membership is reduced to a bare minimum, usually to endorse decisions already made by the elite. Political mobilisation assumes the form of personality cults and loyalty is often to the party leader as opposed to the party as an institution.

Political parties in East Africa as elsewhere across the globe therefore continue to grapple with these ideological, institutional and structural challenges with the potential to compromise their survival, legitimacy and effective functioning. These challenges often result in undesired outcomes such as declining membership, electoral losses, lack of cohesion, factionalism and instability, weak coalitions and poor state of internal democracy (Meinhardt and Patel, 2003: 33). These factors ultimately undermine political parties' effectiveness as agents of democracy in the wider society.

Contemporary democracy assistance programmes developed largely in the west tend to approach the study of and interventions in political party development in Africa with a set of indicators and criteria by which political parties can be analysed and measured with regard to their institutionalisation, organisational strength, as well as internal democracy (NIMD 2004). These tools often come with a list of Dos and Don'ts that sets 'minimum standards' for party behaviour and organisation (NDI 2008). The question however remains whether these models based on western theoretical analyses and assumptions on the role and functions of political parties are practical, useful, and acceptable to political practitioners in African party political environments. The following section delves deeper into the contemporary conceptualisation of intra-party democracy and its applicability in African settings. This is followed by an empirical examination of the state of intra-party democracy in East Africa that examines whether or not political parties in the region conform to these models. The paper then concludes with an analysis of the practical and theoretical applicability of existing models and proposes ways in which these can be improved.

### Conceptualising Intra-party Democracy

The primary democratic function of political parties is to link the citizenry with the government (Sartori 2005:11). In order to play this role effectively, political parties have to provide opportunities for effective participation by party members, activists and leaders in the party's decision making processes. Intra-party democracy (IPD) therefore refers to the extent to which political parties' decision making structures and processes provide opportunities for individual citizens to influence the choices that parties offer to voters. Discourse on intra-party democracy is anchored in theories of *participatory democracy* which can be described as processes that emphasize the broad participation (in decision making) of citizens in the direction and operation of political systems. Membership participation is thus a central feature and variable of research into IPD.

Intra-party democracy is however not a universally popular notion and debate continues among policy makers and comparative political theorists regarding the desirability and feasibility of intra-party democracy. Various arguments have been advanced for and against IPD based on differing views on the efficiency and effectiveness of democratic decision making processes. This is certainly the case in East Africa where a combination of increased internal-democracy coupled with low institutionalisation, lack of effective and independent conflict resolution mechanisms as well as a chaotic political culture in a highly heterogeneous society could be a recipe for open conflict and threaten social cohesion. In this section, both sides of the argument are explored with a view to seeking to establish a workable context-specific compromise.

### *Too much democracy? Intra-Party Democracy and party effectiveness*

The iron law of oligarchy (Michels, 1962) argues that political parties are inherently undemocratic and have a tendency towards oligarchy. According to this argument, intra-party democracy is cumbersome and leads to inefficient decision making processes which are at variance with the ultimate desire for well organised, structured and institutionalised party systems. This view is further supported by arguments that intra-party democracy weakens political parties and compromises their ability to compete against their opponents and is therefore undesirable (Durveger, 1954: 134). Proponents of this view argue that 'in order to serve democratic ends, political parties themselves must be ruled by oligarchic principles' (Teorell 1999: 364).

Intra-party democracy, it is argued, impedes decision-making, precludes parties from choosing candidates they regard as most appealing to the electorate and transfers key political decisions to a small group of activists at the expense of the broader party membership (Gauja 2006). Intra-party democracy is also seen as lessening party cohesion while increasing the risk of internal dissension. This impinges on party efficiency as more energy and time is spent on internal competition and conflict resolution as opposed to concentrating on the core priorities of electoral and governmental success.

The foregoing arguments seem to underline the position that intra-party democracy does not necessarily lead to better political party effectiveness and electoral victory and nether does it contribute to the deepening of democracy in the wider society. To the contrary oligarchy seems to be a more appealing option for political parties in presenting a united front, both to the electorate and the opposing parties (Wright 1971:446). This approach seems to be more appealing especially in highly fractious and heterogeneous societies in Africa. Many African leaders have used this argument in compelling ways to defend autocratic single party rule or the total proscription of political parties in the name of national cohesion, development and state building (Okuku 2002).

Oligarchic political party structures are characterised by elite and leadership control of the party at the expense of the party membership, more often than not leading to undemocratic and authoritarian governments. This seems to reflect the prevailing situation in a majority of political parties in both authoritarian African states as well as those undergoing political liberalisation. This would suggest that while institutions may changed, political culture is yet to follow suit and political parties in such societies tend to have highly centralised and non-inclusive decision making processes and are therefore not internally democratic. In such cases therefore, political party fail to fulfil their functions as agents of democratisation in contributing to the deepening and widening of democracy.

Proponents of the competitive model of democracy (Schumpeter 1942; Dahl 1956; Downs 1957 Miller 1983; Sartori 1987), argue that a system of competitive political parties is necessary for effective interest aggregation and the channelling of those in competing for government. A balance therefore needs to be struck that ensures the growth of such effective and competitive political party systems as well safeguarding and strengthening participatory democracy in the wider society. Only then can intra-party democracy promote the efficiency and competitiveness of political parties while at the same time deepening democracy itself.

### *The case for Intra-party democracy*

The choice between direct (participatory) democracy and representative democracy is both normative and ideological. Proponents of direct democracy who favour direct citizens' participation in governance processes decry the failure of representative democracy through the political party system as an ineffective alternative. How then can this gap be bridged and what institutional safeguards can be built into representative democracy in order to guarantee acceptable levels of citizen participation in the absence of direct democracy? How can intra-party democracy fill this gap without compromising the effectiveness and efficiency of political parties?

The appeal of intra-party democracy lies in the argument that it may 'facilitate citizen-self rule, permit the broadest deliberation in determining public policy and constitutionally guaranteeing all the freedoms necessary for open political competition' (Joseph 1997: 365). This approach combines perspectives of participatory and deliberative democracy that emphasise the central features of participation and contestation. Participatory democrats place a high premium on citizen participation in political processes and a sense of civic responsibility. According to van Biezen (2004) only then can a political system warrant the label of a 'democracy'. McPherson (1977) develops this argument further by proposing a pyramidal system of intra-party democracy 'with direct democracy at the base and a delegate democracy at every level above that' supplemented by a system of competitive political parties (Teorell 1999:368). Since a truly participatory model of democracy in the form of Athenian direct democracy is not feasible due to the complexity of societies, political parties bridge the gap between citizens and government by providing avenues for citizen's participation through effective intra-party democracy.

The deliberative theory of democracy has of late gained ground by emphasising that democracy is a product of deliberation among free, equal and rational citizens (Elser 1998). This approach sees democracy as a process rather than an outcome. Dryzek (2000) concurs that democracy is thus a process of 'deliberation as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights or even self government.' This approach emphasises the process by which opinions are formed, policies formulated and programmes developed. All these models present various normative approaches to the concept of intra-party democracy. They are by no means conclusive or incontestable, but chart the broad parameters within which more refined and context specific structures and processes can be advanced in favour of intra-party democracy.

### *Functions of Intra-Party Democracy*

Normative theorizing aside, research on intra-party democracy tends to focus on a utilitarian perspective that seeks to establish empirical causal relationships associated with processes of intra-party democracy. Research remains inconclusive on whether and to what extent parties need to be internally democratic in order to promote democracy within the wider society. According to Scarrow (2005:3) political parties that practice intra-party democracy 'are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders, to have more responsive policies, and, as a result, to enjoy greater electoral success... (and) strengthen democratic culture generally'.

Other arguments in favour of intra-party democracy suggest that it encourages political equality by creating a level playing field in candidate selection and policy development within the party; ensures popular control of government by extending democratic norms to party organisations such as transparency and accountability; and it improves the quality of public debate by fostering inclusive and deliberative practices within parties (Gauja 2006:6).

In East Africa, political parties are largely characterised by a top-down organisational structure where power and decision making is highly centralised. This leaves little room for deliberative decision making processes involving party membership. This organisational structure is inherited from the colonial legacy where colonial administrators and political elites dictated to and made decisions on behalf of the native populations without consultation (Kanyongolo and Malyamkono 2003:273). Political parties therefore tend to be autocratic or oligarchic in their organisational structures where conformity is preferable to critical debate of issues and is enforced through covert and overt pressure, and illegal sanctions including suspension and even expulsion from the party. These practices lead to severe limitations of inclusiveness and transparency while breeding patrimonialism hence compromising intra-party democracy.

Political parties are therefore largely perceived more as vehicles for contesting and attaining public office and less as institutions for democratic consolidation. The desirability of intra-party democracy is therefore more likely to be viewed in terms of its usefulness in improving the overall political party effectiveness against its competitors. This denotes an outcome oriented approach, but as the discussion above suggest, this liberal view of democracy is incompatible with a participatory perspective of intra-party democracy (Wanjohi 2003, Salih 2003, Oloo 2007).

The success of intra-party democracy in Africa therefore lies in understanding the motivations of individual agency as well as functional aspects of political parties. While contemporary democracy assistance programmes that prescribe attitude change away from a result oriented towards a process oriented approach may be desirable, this may prove difficult to achieve in the end. A fine and pragmatic balance must thus be struck between an emphasis on party processes that entrench democratic culture by increasing citizens' participation with result oriented approached that strengthen political party effectiveness. Political parties should not be seen just as 'incubators that nurture citizens' political competence' (Scarrow 2005), but also as channels of political contestation, resource allocation and interest aggregation. In such polities characterised by low levels of civic awareness, intra-party democracy provides opportunities to expand civic education and awareness through participation while at the same time devolving power and decision making processes to broader sections of society.

### Political Party Systems in East Africa

Political party systems determine the form and substance of political competition among parties that in turn determines the way in which parties organise internally and present themselves to their opponents and the wider public. A party system refers to the classifications of internal and external networks and relationships of political parties. They comprise 'the alliances, coalitions, negotiations and debates' that political parties engage in and that form the 'crucial aspects of political life, the structure of the governing polity and the nature of political stability' (Salih and Nordlund 2007: 43).

Uganda and Tanzania are one-dominant-party systems where both CCM and NRM enjoy electoral success and uninterrupted periods in power. Kenya has a two dominant party system since the 2002 elections. Uganda has six political parties represented in the country's parliament, Tanzania five and Kenya no less than twenty three (23) almost all under either the PNU or ODM umbrella parties. While Kenya has held competitive multiparty elections since 1992 and Tanzania since 1995, Uganda has only had one in 2006. Its pluralist politics is therefore still infantile and can be described as a dominant authoritarian party system.

**Table 4.1: Part Systems in East Africa as of January 2008**

	Parties at Independence	Single party rule	Multi-party elections	Registered parties	Parties in Parliament	Party System
<b>Uganda</b>	3	1969-2005	2006	35	6	One-Dominant Party
<b>Tanzania</b>	6	1964-77-1992	95/2000/2005	19	5	One-Dominant Party
<b>Kenya</b>	2	1964-66, 1969-1991	92/97/2002/2007	156	23	Two-Dominant Party

*Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union*

Whereas political parties form the mainstay of political organisation and representation, their level of institutionalisation is still relatively weak. In such circumstances, dominant party systems have a negative effect on competitive politics. In Uganda for instance, opposition parties operate under severe constraints imposed by the authoritarian NRM government (Chege 2007). The lack of institutionalised structures within political parties leads to the development of personality cult politics. President Museveni for instance, does not seem to respect his own NRM party. During the 2006 elections, he set up parallel structures for his campaigns, ran by close associates from the military. It is these parallel structures rather than the civilian party taskforce that are credited with ensuring his victory in the elections.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, President Kibaki in Kenya abandoned his sponsoring party NARC and set up a new political party the PNU just three months before the 2007 December general elections. His campaign secretariat was run by professionals drawn from the private sector while politicians associated with his coalition partner parties were shunned leading to numerous complaints, disorganisation and dissent.<sup>3</sup> This portrays a system where political elites have scant respect for political parties as institutions and only see their value as convenient tools for contesting elections and can be discarded once they have served their purpose. Political parties therefore tend to be dormant after elections only to be revived at the next election cycle (Chege 2007: 25).

Dominant party systems pose a challenge to democracy in general and may lead to less intra-party democracy since they dominate the legislature and monopolise the law making process. In most cases, parliament loses its sovereignty as an independent arm of government; it simply exists to rubberstamp and legitimise decisions by the executive organ of the ruling party. This scenario is made worse in simple majority or First-Past-The-Post electoral systems that prevail in all three East African countries. In a situation where the vote is divided between numerous parties, it is possible that a party can form government with a minority of the vote. This was the case in Kenya after the 1997 elections in which KANU formed the government with less than 36% of the total votes cast (Wanjohi 2005:75). Governments formed by dominant party systems can be less accountable to the legislature and the wider electorate while the opposition is too weak to hold it to account. Such party systems are therefore resistant to any structural changes and reforms that are likely to weaken their stronghold on power.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ssali Simba, Interview Sep. 13, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Daily Nation December 1, 2007

This notwithstanding, legislation governing political parties has been introduced on all three countries under various Political Party Acts. Legal regulation of political parties is becoming a standard norm in the region and is widely seen as a positive development especially where public funding of political parties is concerned. This strengthens the competitive capacity of opposition parties against the ruling parties which often rely on state resources that give them undue advantage. Reforms contained in the party laws however contain significant short comings regarding enforcement, oversight and the independence of regulatory bodies and the possibility of state interference. Additionally, provisions in existing party laws in Tanzania and Uganda prohibit the formation of coalitions hence denying party members and political parties the free will to decide what form of political organisation best suits their interests.

In light of the weak institutional and organisational capacity of political parties in the region, legal regulation is seen as likely to encourage intra-party democracy by fostering processes of accountability and transparency by ensuring the conduct of regular elections, financial accountability and institutionalisation of inclusiveness. Party law also serves to encourage institutionalisation and organisational capacity of political parties in order to improve their competitiveness in elections. Regulation encourages parties to offer better policy options and more capable candidates emerging from competitive and credible selection processes. It may also increase party responsiveness and accountability to its membership and raise levels of membership participation in party activities and programmes thus reducing oligarchic tendencies and the overwhelming powers of party leaders.

Party law is by no means a panacea for low intra-party democracy or weak organisational and institutional structures or for the deepening of democracy in the wider society. Political parties are a reflection of the societies from which they arise and their effectiveness depends largely on the political culture and other context specific variables. Any programmes that seek to promote democracy through political party assistance should therefore take cognisance of these factors. In weak democracies with hegemonic parties for instance, the state machinery can still be employed to thwart the interests of democracy. In countries undergoing democratic transitions, party law can be useful in the consolidation of democratic gains and strengthening democratic institutions.

## Intra-Party Democracy in Empirical Perspective

### **1. Institutionalisation: Organisational Rules and Regulatory Framework**

Political parties are by definition membership organisations whose procedures for the conduct of their affairs are stipulated in the articles of association usually deposited with the registering authority. Almost all political parties in East Africa have developed party rules and regulations governing the conduct of party affairs. These are usually contained in basic party documents such as the party constitution. Additionally, some parties have such other documents as the party rule book, as well as manifestos and strategic plans. The conduct of internal party affairs are also legally regulated by national legislation either in the country's constitution or various Political Party Acts.

Party law provides some general guidelines regarding expectations for internal democracy within political parties. These include requirements for periodic and democratic internal leadership elections, evidence of national outlook, sanctioning of discriminatory practices and guarantees for membership participation. Political parties are expected to comply with these regulations by adopting them in their own party documents such as constitutions.



Virtually all registered political parties in the region have, at least on paper, basic party documents that espouse and guarantee processes of internal democracy through leadership election, membership participation, selection of candidates, policy formulation and finances. There however still exists in practice a wide gap in implementation. African political parties are generally characterised by low levels of institutionalisation and East Africa is no exception. Party law does not for instance define what it means by 'periodic and democratic' elections, leaving open room for interpretation. Additionally, there are hardly any provisions for monitoring and verification. Political parties are therefore left to define how and to what extent they adhere to these regulations.

The majority of political parties, especially new ones do not have broad-based structures or offices across the country as they are confined within the main urban centres. Where rural support exists, it is usually based on ethnic, regional or other parochial cleavages (Oloo 2007). The lack of a broad-based countrywide outlook and representation gives incumbent parties such as CCM and NRM ammunition against opposition parties branding them as tribal and divisive elements. Political fragmentation means that in such countries as Kenya, no single party can muster the requisite support to win an election and form a government on its own. This has led to a culture of forming coalition arrangements which are also structured along ethnic and regional lines. More often than not, these coalitions are fragile power-sharing pacts and are not negotiated on principles of sound party ideology and programmes in the interest of the party membership and/or the electorate. The result is even further political and social polarisation which may result in open conflict.

In terms of ensuring ethical conduct, party documents have elaborate disciplinary mechanisms and procedures but most parties are more concerned with recruiting and retaining members than seeking to discipline errant ones. Most parties have no capacity, manpower and resources to engage in the exercise. Due to the elite control of party organs, there are hardly any structural provisions for the party membership to hold the leadership accountable. All parties therefore prioritise membership recruitment drives, mobilisation and sensitization, and policy propagation as a key element of their strategic plans.

The challenge of institutionalisation lies less in legislation and more in the implementation of existing provisions within the party documents. While all the parties have institutional and organisational structures that seek to promote intra-party democracy, it is often the case that these are not effectively implemented in practice. Informal institutional arrangements such as cronyism, ethnicity and patronage tend to take precedence over formal institutional structures. Party ideologies and policies that emerge through such structures tend to be unrepresentative and non-inclusive of wider party membership, thus compromising the effectiveness of a party as a mobilising force and a focus for aggregation of wider social concerns and aspirations. These failures subsequently impede on the degree of intra-party democracy.

## **2. Founding principles and Policy formulation**

The majority of independence parties in East Africa were founded upon a liberation ideology of African Nationalism. Structurally, they were organised as mass movements embodying the aspirations for majority African self government and liberation from colonial rule (Wanjohi 2003). The ideological foundations of the independence parties have not changed much despite the passage of time and societal changes. Such parties as CCM still exhibit organisational characteristics of strong centralisation associated with autocratic tendencies designed for the

consolidation of power. This is often characterised by deliberate stifling of both internal and external criticism, dissent and opposition.

Parties formed in the early 1990's were essentially anti-establishment, pro-democracy movements created as a response to and means of resistance to the excesses of the authoritarian one-party state (Oloo 2007). These were formed largely out of civil society and pressure groups that fought for political pluralism during the single-party regimes and later coalesced into political parties. In this category fall such parties as the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) in Kenya; Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) in Uganda; as well as The National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR-Mageuzi) and CUF in Tanzania. A relatively new 'third' category of 'coalition' political parties is emerging in Kenya. These are umbrella parties usually formed out of pre-election pacts formed by parties that agree to field a single presidential candidate. The run-up to the 2002 general elections saw the creation of NARC and in 2007 ODM and PNU as the main coalition parties going into the elections.

While most new parties espouse principles of human rights, fundamental freedoms and genuine democracy, they have in practice largely been motivated by a single issue; the removal of the incumbent ruler and their party from power (Wanjohi 2003). These parties generally do not espouse any distinct and identifiable ideologies or programmes different from the independence parties. They are characterised and easily recognisable largely by their ethnic, regional or religious affiliations and the social cleavages they represent as opposed to any distinct policy and ideological positions (Oloo 2007, wa Kuhenga 2007).

Consequently, their internal organisation and institutional structures do not reflect principles of intra-party democracy. In Uganda the DP is perceived as historically representing the interests of the Buganda (central region) and Catholics, while UPC is associated with protestant leanings and draws the bulk of its support from the north and eastern parts of the country (Ogutu 2007). The outcome of general elections in Kenya since the introduction of multi-partism shows a clear trend in which parties and candidates draw support and win elections based on regional and ethnic support bases or strongholds. Party alliances have also been forged along ethnic lines (Oloo 2007). Not all parties however conform to this model. In Tanzania, opposition party members and leaders argue that over time, they have broadened their support base. This may be the case for such parties as FDC in Uganda which although drawing the bulk of its support from urban populations, this seems to cut across ethnic or regional cleavages.

### *Policy formulation*

Policy development under such circumstances is mostly a centralised and top-down process. Policy documents are mostly drafted by departmental heads, national executive committee members, or consultants at the national level, they are then presented at party secretariats for discussion and improvement and then ratified at a delegates' conference.. This is the general trend across all parties in all three countries. Interviews with KANU, CHADEMA and FDC officials indicate that members play a minor to insignificant role in policy formulation. This is contrary to party documents such as manifestos and constitutions that talk of membership consultation through workshops and conferences to initiate policy development. For CCM for instance, the process is initiated by the central committee, then approved by the National Executive Committee and eventually adopted by the national delegates' conference. Most parties follow the same pattern that lacks inclusivity of members' views in the development of such crucial party documents as strategic plans, campaign manifestos and party platforms. Participatory democracy, a central component of intra-party democracy is thus compromised.

In general, the use of opinion polling is a relatively new phenomenon. Some parties claim to use these tools in policy formulation, but polling is not restricted to party membership. They instead use public opinion polls the results of which give general perceptions, which do not necessarily reflect the wishes of the party membership. There is no evidence therefore of intra-party democracy in ideology and policy formulation processes within political parties in the region.

In principle, the national party leadership is answerable to its membership through the national delegates' conference which serves as the highest decision making organ of the party. In practice however, there is hardly any accountability to party membership since they do not participate in the policy formulation processes in the first place. Lower party leadership levels are expected to be accountable at their respective levels to the immediate higher organs, but lack of accountability at the national level often deters commitment to accountability in the party branches.

### **3. Membership**

One of the significant challenges for the institutionalisation and democratisation of political parties in Africa in general is the lack of distinct and disciplined party membership (Oloo 2007). Political parties are characterised more by supporters as opposed to card holding registered membership. Party affiliation is thus fluid and membership participation in multiple parties is not uncommon. While membership recruitment is delegated to the branch or district levels, most parties do not have structures beyond the major urban centres and in some cases only in their regional strongholds. In most cases card carrying membership ended with the demise of autocratic single party rule where card possession was proof of political loyalty and patriotism. Membership was in most cases through coercion, hence the negative attitude towards registered card-carrying membership. Most political parties become dormant after elections and the lack of political activity involving party members adversely affects the external credibility and internal democracy within parties. Decision making processes then move to the parliamentary caucuses or other central party organs.

Intense competition for electoral support among the multitude of new political parties also places a low premium on the restriction of participation in party activities to registered members. Party elites fear alienating potential voters should they restrict participation for instance in party primaries only to registered members (Muite 2007 interview). Party law across the region does not make any stipulations regarding party membership and although almost all parties have regulations regarding party membership, these guidelines are often ignored. Various party instruments such as party constitutions set out members' rights, responsibilities and obligations. All the parties studied refer to the existence of a membership register organised at three levels; Branch, District and National level or head quarters. Interestingly though, none of the parties could actually produce documentation to support the existence of a membership list or give exact figures.

Declining and low party membership on the part of old and new parties respectively can be attributed in part to their lack of capacity to carry out effective membership recruitment drives. The parties are limited by their lack of institutional structures and resources for mobilisation and penetration countrywide. With the exception of the dominant ruling parties NRM and CCM, most parties charge a minimum fee for basic membership (either annual or one-off subscription). It is worth noting however that due to massive rural poverty, many can not afford to pay the membership fee and the practice in Kenya for instance is for prospective candidates to buy cards for distribution among intended supporters at the grass-roots.

The role of party membership in the formulation of party policies and selection of candidates is virtually non-existent. The delegates' conference or congress is generally described as the highest decision-making organ of the party whose decisions are binding to the party. In practice however, these delegates are usually carefully handpicked by party operatives according to their loyalty to particular party elites from their own regions and calculated to give as much support as possible to the regional party stalwarts. In many cases, with the exception of a few, most parties do not have any real structures at the grassroots from where delegates should be democratically elected. The delegates' selection process is usually yet another demonstration of the politics of personality cults, sycophancy and patronage as opposed to genuine processes of intra-party democracy. Although stipulations exist regarding the members' roles, rights and responsibilities, and these are not implemented in practice. In most cases, party conferences simply served to endorse and legitimise party platforms, election manifestos and elected office holders.

Effective communication between the party and its members is also a key component in ensuring a constant exchange and inclusion of members' views in party planning. This is another significant challenge facing African political parties due to the lack of infrastructural capacity. Public rallies, party meetings and individual correspondence seem to be the most frequent form of communication between parties and members. Some parties are slowly embracing new technology such as mobile telephony and internet for communication; about half of the parties studied have websites containing basic party information, though most of them are not regularly updated. Advertisements in the media, billboards and leaflets are used during election campaigns, but do not form part of regular party communication strategies. Intra-party communication more often than not tends to be one-way as members rarely take the initiative to communicate with the party or party officials.

With limited resources to hold public rallies and delegates conferences, even physical communication afforded through such forums are limited and sporadic. Party caucuses for special interest groups such as women and youth wings are crucial in achieving inclusiveness and greater intra-party democracy. These are however not fully developed and are not operational in most political parties. Except for the DP's Uganda Young Democrats (UYD), CCM's Umoja wa Vijana (Youth Wing) and Umoja wa Wanawake (Women's wing), there is not much evidence of a strong focus in revamping and strengthening these institutions which are only mobilised during election campaigns.

#### **4. Leadership and Candidate Selection**

One of the key processes of expanding inclusiveness in party procedures and decision-making is the recruitment and selection of party leaders and candidates. These processes allow parties excellent opportunities to demonstrate their inclusiveness by providing opportunities for participation of their members and supporters. It is therefore important that parties make choices that make such processes not only inclusive, but also free and fair and to be seen to be so.

##### ***Leadership Selection***

Electoral systems in East Africa as in many African countries are single-member parliamentary (constituency) and presidential systems. This means that the selection of a party leader is equivalent to selecting the party's presidential candidate, should the party choose to field one during elections. Whatever the case, the choice of party leader determines the image as well as

the course the party will take. This is more so in African party systems characterized by oligarchy. In most cases, overwhelming power and influence is concentrated on the party leader or a few of his cronies who hold significant sway over party policies, programmes and selection of other leaders and candidates. Technically, almost all political parties surveyed select their national leadership through the delegates conference, a form of party caucus in which representatives from the lower branch or district levels of the party meet at the national level. According to most party rule-books, these delegates are supposed to be elected by party members at the branch, district or constituency levels and are supposed to be widely representative of women, youth and other marginalized groups.

Convening a national delegates' conference is usually huge logistical undertaking for most parties with limited financial means. Coupled with the acrimony, confrontation and friction that the exercise raises, many parties shy away or totally avoid holding such conferences unless they absolutely have to, usually in order to meet legal obligations. In less institutionalised political parties, party positions are divided between the party elites, usually among its founders, chief financiers or regional and ethnic chieftains in boardroom deals. Delegates' congresses are subsequently mere pomp and ceremony meant to legitimise already agreed upon leadership positions devoid of any real participation by party members (Oloo 2007, Wanjohi 2003).

Highly centralised political parties such as CCM equally have less inclusive leadership selection processes. The Central Committee is the most powerful organ of the party with overwhelming power over nomination and recommendation of party members for the positions of chairperson and deputy chairperson of the party; the president of the republic Tanzania; MPs and members of the House of Representatives. Not only does the organ nominate members to contest leadership positions, it also has the supervisory role of monitoring the implementation of party elections as well as appointment of district party leaders. Such a highly centralised system is characteristic of ruling parties in one-dominant-party systems that have often retained power since the era of single-party rule. This is the case with NRM in Uganda where the influential National Executive Council nominates candidates for top party positions such as president, chairperson and deputy, secretary general and deputy as well as treasurer. Those nominated are more often than not simply endorsed by the national conference without any alterations.

The lack of inclusive and democratic leadership selection processes with no clear mechanisms for neutral and independent dispute arbitration often has negative consequences for party unity and cohesiveness. Consequently, more often than not, intra-party rivalry spills out into open conflict and possibly party splits. Kenya has perhaps been the theatre of the most divisive party wrangles arising from undemocratic and non-inclusive leadership selection processes. In 2002 in Kenya for example, the then ruling party KANU disintegrated after incumbent President Daniel Arap Moi unilaterally appointed a relatively untested Uhuru Kenyatta, son of his predecessor and first president Jomo Kenyatta as party leader. Senior party elites who had been waiting in the wings and looked to a democratic and inclusive succession process broke away to form the Liberal Democratic Party and teamed up with the opposition to form the Rainbow coalition, which dethroned KANU from power.

KANU lost massively in the ensuing election and has not recovered ever since. Subsequent wrangles over leadership elections in 2006 saw Uhuru's leadership of KANU annulled in court only to be reinstated later. This was followed by a split within KANU with the creation of a new faction, the New KANU. In 2007, similar leadership wrangles saw the split of no less than four leading parties in the run-up to that year's general election. Some of the parties affected were ODM, FORD-Kenya, KANU and NARC.

Undemocratic and unrepresentative leadership selection processes therefore have significant and often negative consequences on party cohesion, unity and effectiveness in contesting elections. Internal wrangles often lead to weakening of parties, splits, defections and formation of new or revival of moribund parties. Impartial and independent conflict resolution mechanisms as well as institutional respect for electoral outcomes are therefore necessary for the success of intra-party democracy and safeguards against oligarchy. In societies where regionalism and ethnicity is the organising principle, wider considerations of national security and stability are at stake. Democracy assistance programmes should therefore carefully counterbalance the promotion of intra-party democracy with considerations for political stability.

### *Candidate Selection*

Candidate selection is a fundamental process of a political party's engagement with its membership and the wider electorate. The process by which candidates for elected positions are chosen is perhaps as important as the type of candidates selected. The result determines the party's profile against its competitors during elections as well as determining the loyalty of its members and supporters. The degree to which party members and supporters are included in this process is therefore significant in determining a party's electoral success.

The most open and inclusive form of candidate selection is the direct ballot or party primaries where eligible party members or supporters pre-select party candidates through direct elections. There are variations to this model depending on who is eligible to vote in the primaries. In most western democracies, participation is restricted to registered party members. This is however not the case with most African parties that do not have registered membership. The process is usually open to citizens eligible to vote during the general election.

All political parties studied have clear party rules and guidelines on candidate selection. In most cases, an election board is set up to vet interested candidates who must be approved by a party organ before they can be given the green light to contest. The more centralised the party structure, the tighter the control on vetting and clearance of candidates. On the other hand, a party needs to ensure that potential candidates are selected on specific criteria that will strengthen the party going into an election. Some considerations include a candidate's ability to finance their own campaigns, party loyalty, electability, adherence to party ideology and platform and ability to work fellow party members.

Eligibility criteria for both parliamentary and presidential candidates closely mirror provisions contained in the various country's constitutions. In most cases, interested candidates collect application forms from the party's national secretariat and pay an application or nomination fee. This is usually a convenient fundraising strategy for the party. Conversely, the high fees charged can be prohibitive and may deter capable but less wealthy candidates and may render politics a preserve of the rich. The high costs of campaigns often funded by individual candidates only serves to exacerbate the situation and may breed a culture of political corruption in campaign financing.

Not all parties however follow this pre-selection procedure. Due to the immense logistical and financial requirements for such a national exercise, some parties prefer to have a centralised candidate selection process in which applicants are vetted by the appropriate national party organs and given direct nominations. This is usually the practice with smaller parties with less capacity to mobilise and manage nationwide party primaries. Though less acrimonious, such a process denies party members any role in the selection of its candidates. The need for inclusivity

and openness in party primaries by opening the process to all potential voters regardless of party membership has potential costs to the party. This is often the case in situations where parties have no clear record of membership, or where parties fear alienating potential voters in the actual election by restricting candidate selection to registered members.

The logistical difficulties, limited financial resources and fear of ensuing wrangles and divisions are just but some of the factors that make party elites fail to carry out open, transparent and inclusive leadership and candidate selection processes. Poor institutional and organisational capacity, inherent structural weaknesses and pre-existing tensions between different camps and loyalties often impede the conduct of free and fair leadership and candidate selection processes. Consequently, these crucial party activities are often carried out by central party organs and are characterised by careful regional, ethnic and personal power balancing and horse-trading that ensure the loyalty and contentment of leading and influential party figures. Party leaders often prefer to keep such powerful kingpins in their camps as opposed to having them defect and either pose serious competition to their parties or carry with them a huge chunk of much needed votes come a general election.

All these processes add up to the emasculation of intra-party democracy by alienating party members and reducing them to mere pawns in a high stakes game between party elites. It is not surprising that membership loyalty is not to particular parties, but allegiance is instead paid to individual party leaders usually commanding regional or ethnic bases. Interventions in favour of increased intra-party democracy in leadership and candidate selection may therefore take into consideration their social, economic and political implications, the country's unique political culture and the expectations of the different social groups and stakes involved.

## Conclusions

Political parties are essential institutions for the proper functioning of a democratic society. As social organisations designed for contesting and attaining political power, they play an even more significant role in societies undergoing democratic transitions. Political parties serve several functions including determining the content of the political order, selecting authoritative leaders, resolving disputes, maintaining order and promoting the various interests of the community among diverse and contending social forces. In young democracies characterised by weak institutions, fragile social cohesion, heterogeneity, corruption, rampant poverty and in some cases facing the threat of conflict, the role political parties can not be underestimated.

In East Africa, political parties therefore face higher expectations than in established western democracies and in order to achieve these objectives, political parties have to offer genuine avenues for effective membership participation in order not only to form credible and well functioning governments, but to also enhance social order and security. Intra-party democracy is therefore essential for the creation and growth of well functioning and sustainable democratic institutions hence fostering and deepening a democratic culture within the wider society.

Adequate institutionalisation of party structures and processes are necessary in securing and enforcing the principle-agent relationship between party members and the elected party representatives. The deliberative model of democracy involving wider social representation is therefore necessary in order to ensure that party decision-making and operational procedures are debated freely and collectively agreed upon among all members as equals. This necessitates active support for institutionalised decentralisation in which lower party organs and members are

empowered and included in the party's deliberative decision-making processes. This means that the representational capacity of political parties should be institutionalised in such a way that it is geared towards the articulation, realisation and protection of the interests of the membership as opposed to the prevailing situation where elite interests supersede or trump the interests of wider society.

In order to address some of the systemic, institutional and structural weaknesses of the party political environment, all three East African countries have enacted political party laws. These are however not aimed at reforming the entire party political and electoral systems, but only target the regulation of political parties, laying down guidelines for their registration, funding and conduct. Legal regulation of political parties is widely seen as a positive development especially where public funding of political parties is concerned. With regard to intra-party democracy, party laws however contain significant shortcomings as they do not set out clear guidelines and specific requirements for membership participation, accountability and oversight that ensure higher standards of adherence especially on issues of corruption and party finance. More effort should thus be made to entrench proper procedures in party documents that create a culture of respect for institutionalisation, accountability and transparency.

This research reveals that intra-party democracy is significantly influenced by unwritten informal arrangements in the conduct of party affairs. Not all informal institutional arrangements are necessarily negative and detrimental to intra-party democracy. To the contrary, they can be complimentary and may serve to solve conflicts arising from competing interests among party members and the leadership. This may in turn serve to promote the efficient performance of formal institutional arrangements. Some informal institutional arrangements may indeed enhance participatory democracy by promoting a culture of debate and consultations within the party. It is therefore necessary to identify and encourage such arrangements that may be critical to the enhancement of intra-party democracy while guarding against those that may impede its promotion.

The lack of inclusiveness in ideology and policy formulation processes is most glaring among all political parties in the region. This is one of the most centralised and non-inclusive aspects both institutionally and structurally. Party formation and ideological orientation is usually the preserve of a few individuals who characteristically become the party 'owners'. These founders tend to centralise power and decision-making prerogatives among themselves. More often than not, the process of policy formulation is outsourced to expert consultants or associates of the party leadership. The process thus severely compromises intra-party democracy by disenfranchising party members, diminishing the sense of ownership and compromising party loyalty. Such practices only serve to entrench personality politics where loyalty to the party is substituted with personal loyalty hence further diminishing prospects for party institutionalisation.

It needs to be determined whether and to what extent party leaders and members in African societies value the role of party ideology, and whether this has any significant place in contemporary African political party organisation. What is the place of ideology in young democracies grappling with high levels of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and other developmental challenges? Is there a preference perhaps for pragmatic party programmes and platforms as opposed to ideology? What is the role of individual agency of the party leaders and do they hold the same values as do western democracies? Considerations for these and more issues need to be made in order to better understand underlying mechanisms behind the nature and character of political parties in East Africa.



Regarding participation in leadership and candidate selection processes, most parties fail to hold internal leadership elections. A large number of parties especially in Kenya are yet to hold credible internal leadership elections since their formation and are perpetually led by interim officials. When elections are held, there are critical deficits such as significant delays, they are usually marred by corruption, bribery, threats, intimidation and in some cases open violence. Conflicts arising may be so intense as to result in party splits. Newly enacted party law in Kenya and Uganda and a review of enforcement mechanisms in Tanzania are intended to rectify these anomalies. The issue of party law and political party regulation however remains contestable. It is debatable whether indeed aspects of intra-party democracy can and should be externally legislated by the state or be left to self regulation within political party structures and institutions. None the less, effort can be made to strengthen a culture of respect and acceptance of electoral outcomes. Where conflict arises, independent, credible and mutually respected conflict resolution mechanisms should be strengthened. This may include formal and informal mechanisms that combine possibilities for arbitration as well as legal redress.

In terms of candidate selection, there are strong tendencies towards centralisation, imposition of unpopular candidates, granting of automatic nomination, rigging and in some cases manipulation of rules of procedure. Although most parties have clearly stipulated internal rules regulating the selection of party candidates, they are not fully adhered to. The scenario is also compounded by the lack of clear, impartial and credible conflict resolution mechanisms. Where conflicts arise, national courts are hesitant to arbitrate preferring to leave such disputes to be resolved through internal party machinery. Only recently have arbitration powers been granted to the registrar of political parties, but external regulators are either hesitant to interfere or lack the independence or capacity to intervene. As such, while institutional arrangements theoretically enhance intra-party democracy, in practice, both the absence and, where they exist, weak internal and external enforcement undermine free and popular participation in candidate selection processes.

The effectiveness of intra-party democracy should therefore be seen, not in isolation, but as part of a whole set of context specific variables that determine the character and functions that political parties serve in distinct democratic settings. As an element of participatory democracy, its appeal should be viewed not only in its ability to encourage a culture of democratic engagement and collective ownership of decisions, but also in promoting party unity through incorporation of processes that reduce factionalism and fragmentation. The attainment of these democratic ideals can only be realised depending on the extent to which processes of effective membership participation are formally stipulated and practically implemented in the party's organisational rules and procedures. While debate continues on how much internal democracy is good for political party effectiveness, consensus may be found in developing mechanisms and approaches by which intra-party democracy serves to increase and deepen levels of participatory democracy in the wider society.

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