



Centre d'Alerte et de Prévention des Conflits

**MAJOR CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL POINTS OF LEVERAGE
IN THE DRIVE TO ENCOURAGE POLITICAL PARTIES IN
BURUNDI TO FORMULATE POLICIES AND CARRY OUT
PROGRAMS**

Summary

In partnership with



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“Major challenges and potential points of leverage in the drive to encourage political parties in Burundi to formulate policies and carry out programmes”

SUMMARY

1. Introduction

Following confirmation at the National Meeting held in Bujumbura, Burundi, in October 2008, of the four priority obstacles to lasting peace, the Interpeace local partner in Burundi, CENAP, has now completed the second phase of research and consultations. Burundians from all sectors of society and from different parts of the country have been consulted. During the dialogue they were asked to draw on their own experiences and daily realities. The focus of the discussions were to consider strategies that would lead to elections focused on policies and programs designed to tackle the present problems and meet the new expectations of today’s voters. But to make this change possible, certain conditions will have to be met.

Political parties are not only instruments
to seize power or to maintain it,
but, more importantly,
places where projects and programs should be housed.

Research carried out during the run up to the 2010 elections

The field research was conducted between January 2009 and September 2009 as the political parties were building up to the 2010 elections. On the eve of these second post-conflict elections the political parties are formulating and publicising their policies and programs. But these elections are very different from those of previous elections. The parties cannot rely on the issues that have influenced voters in the previous three elections. People are looking for positive measures to be taken to solve the increasingly complex problems that are making their lives a misery. When those in power are criticised, they blame the magnitude of the destruction caused by the years of conflict¹.

¹ “It seems that the Burundians were expecting a paradise after the 2005 elections”, Gélase Ndabirabe, at that time spokesman of the CNDD-FDD, August 2008

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Turmoil has surrounded elections in the past

The first election in Burundi's path to independence was sabotaged by the assassination of its hero, Prince Louis Rwagasore. This was followed by a period marked by military coups until political pluralism was established in 1992 and two elections followed, in 1993 and 2005. The results of all three of these elections were known in advance because in 1961, Burundians voted for the independence, in 1993 for the end of the 30 years of Tutsi military regime and in 2005 they voted for the end of the civil war.

Attitudes are shifting following the peace agreement

Following the peace agreement over a year ago between the rebel movement and the government, the conflict is now over and the ethnic issue is fading. The population is beginning to exert more pressure on their elected representatives and the requirements of the electorate have changed. With forty four political parties in the arena, it is difficult to predict what will shape the course of democracy in the future, or what the outcome of the electoral campaigns will be. The changes in attitude and circumstances suggest that, as political parties become freed from the dictatorship of ethnic differentiation, they will promote policies that will encourage the electorate to cross parties and historic barriers.

Political parties must work towards consolidating the democratic process

For this shift in attitude to be irreversible, political parties must work towards the consolidation of the democratic process and develop their capacities to provide answers to the expectations of the people regarding the socio-economic dividends of peace.

Challenges lie ahead if recommendations to be implemented

Following this research, the question of development, dissemination of information and facilitation of discussion on programs remains problematic. The political leaders we met as part of the research process said that the programs are in place and that only their members know about them. Some people raised the point that, if political parties were forced by law

to carry out programs, they would be stretched beyond their means, and that others would be limited by precarious financial resources and lack of internal expertise. There are also some who prefer to keep their programs secret in order to prevent them from being copied or stolen by political opponents

- Given the realities, how can a system be set up so that political parties focus on democratic development?
- How can effective programs be developed that are adapted to the new requirements in a way that extends beyond ethnic or regional boundaries?
- How could the country's citizens monitor the quality and effectiveness of their elected representatives' programs and reward or punish them accordingly?
- What mechanisms would need to be set up to do this?
- What would be the role of civil society and the media in the process?

2. Conclusions

Wish for political parties to address daily issues

Today, the people of Burundi expect more dividends from the peace, but remain aware that the horizons are still distant. The wish shared by many participants is that political parties should regularly enter the debate and work towards proposing solutions to everyday problems. The 2010 elections alone cannot "bring miraculous solutions which would change the society", but they could serve as a springboard for a new direction.

Call for political parties to have adequate resources to make the changes possible

For political parties to make the shift required, it is believed that they would need the means, personnel, communications tools, training, etc. The consolidation of a democratic system has a cost, and most parties do not have the financial means to meet it. The first approach would be the setting up of a system of adequate public funding. They would also be a need for additional support systems to ensure political parties were better organized and effective at defining their aims and drawing up programs to achieve their objectives.

3. Recommendations

1. Strengthen the political parties provided they base their actions on programs based on the major concerns of the population

A system of party funding would have to be set up and parties would be required to base their actions on agreed programs and play their role as regulators of democratic life. Their performance could then be measured against the agreed agenda.

This recommendation would solve other issues in parallel:

- a. **Choosing the elected officials based on objective criteria** and not on ethnicity, region, family or political ties;
- b. **Tackling the political migration** or "*brain-drain*" phenomenon. The implementation of a party funding system would address the political migration phenomenon that occurs after every election in Burundi. Political leaders change parties every time power shifts from their camp. When their original party stops offering them the same advantages (posts, missions abroad, etc.) they change their allegiance to the party in power. This situation not only destabilizes the political parties themselves, but sometimes also the functioning of the institutions of State.
- c. **The risk of looking to "pay back"** – exploiting the new power to get benefits back from the State or recovering the money spent in campaigns by accessing State property. The funding of political parties would reduce the use of State property for functioning and campaign purposes. It would decrease the pressure the parties exert over their members, especially those who have been placed in positions of responsibility and who sometimes are considered to use State assets to pay their contributions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen the political parties provided they base their actions on programs based on the major concerns of the population.

2. Establish mechanisms involving all sectors of society in evaluating the implementation of programs by the political actors.

3. Establish a mechanism for the exchange of knowledge and democratic training between the parties themselves on one hand and with the rest of the players on the other.

More importantly, the refocusing of the parties on the political agenda would promote healthy competition, training, professional policies, a controllable majority and a governable opposition.

In exchange, there would be eligibility criteria for public financing, and the financed parties would have to abide by the following conditions:

- Have a process to develop the programs;
- Have a communications strategy for the programs;
- Allow for widespread access by publicising the program in Kirundi and French through the party's committee rooms and website;
- Organize seminars and workshops on social issues;
- Produce regular financial reports and submit accounts to external audit; and
- Hold an annual conference.

In practice, some European countries have developed interesting strategies which apply a combination of the *strict proportionality and strict equality*² rule. For strict proportionality, each party receives funding based on the size of its electorate as measured after the elections, while for the strict equality rule, the parties are treated identically.

The Mali Example: The budget allocated to parties in Mali in 2009 was 1 201 530 822 CFA francs distributed between 62 parties in accordance with the rules established by the Parties' Charter³. The budget allocated to the parties "*represents 0.25% of the tax revenue and is allocated to eligible parties as a key that involves the participation in elections (15%), the number of members of parliament (40%), the number of councillors (35%) and the number of elected women (10%)*"⁴.

² Brändle 2001: 45-46

³ See the website of the Government of Mali: www.primature.go.ml/index.php

⁴ idem

2. Establish mechanisms involving all sectors of society in evaluating the implementation of programs by the political actors

The role of parties is not only to replace politicians in power or change them, but also to govern effectively when in power or propose alternatives when in opposition.

After the elections the citizens must then wait another 5 years to exercise their sovereignty. And most of the people lament the fact that elected officials are protected from popular punishment once installed. But they also complain that more than half of the municipal administrators have been dismissed by the government without any contractual basis for evaluation. Some even question whether intermediary or in office elections could not be an alternative. Others argue that this would be complicated and that it would destabilize the institutions.

In some countries, there are mechanisms to address the need for participatory democracy and for ensuring the accountability of politicians when in power. This system exists in the form of "performance contracts" in Rwanda and "participatory budgeting" in Brazil.

In Rwanda, the system called "*Imihigo*" or "*Performance Contract*" has been established to enable people to participate in identifying priorities and evaluate results in their administrative districts. Annual action plans are drawn up and the elected officials solemnly commit themselves to implementing projects identified as priorities for the community. The role of the community and of the media when assessing the elected officials' performance is valued. Ceremonies are held during which the elected officials present their manifestos and take the oath. These are followed up with days of reporting open to everybody and broadcast live on radio and television.

3. Establish a mechanism for the exchange of knowledge and democratic training between the parties themselves on one hand and with the rest of the players on the other

Outside the framework of regular exchange and discussions run by organizations within civil society and those held by the United Nations, the political parties are not, at present,

transparent in their dealings. Even though they could do so, they do not reveal how they recruit personnel, identify priorities or carry out their work within the administrative or political framework. They deal with their opponents and mark out strategies, but avoid responsibility for developing clear visions and solutions by putting the blame on the country's socio-economic problems.

The new **Parties' Forum**, established in February 2010, which was the result of the UN Peacebuilding Fund's 'Dialogue Framework Project' in which all sectors of society took part, could serve as an interface with the political parties. It would provide space for training and the exchange of knowledge between state structures, civil society, the cultural community and the private sector. The efficiency and capability of political parties could be broadened and extended through training, courses, conferences and seminars, individual counselling.

This framework should be used to change the political debate and provide a research dialogue tool for all those invested with the responsibility for both state and non-state missions. Interaction between all stakeholders involved is essential to democracy.

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