

# **Power Sharing in Zanzibar: Democracy in Transition to Where?**

Aley Soud Nassor  
PhD (Politics) Student, Newcastle Business School  
Faculty of Business and Law  
University of Newcastle

Dr Jim Jose  
Associate Professor in Politics, Newcastle Business School  
Faculty of Business and Law  
University of Newcastle

## **Abstract**

Since the reinstatement of multiparty politics in Zanzibar, political conflict between the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the main opposition party Civic United Front (CUF) has characterized the electoral politics. There have been sporadic incidents of violence, hostilities and mutual distrust leading to increasing destabilization of the current political system. In November 2009 the leaders of the two opposing parties met and subsequently announced that they would set aside their political differences and commit to work together to find a lasting solution through some sort of negotiated power-sharing. This has become a fashionable strategy to resolve political conflicts in Africa when the electoral process is seen to have failed. The paper explores the background to the current political situation in Zanzibar and the some of the issues behind this move to power-sharing. It suggests that a power-sharing approach in a situation where the democratic process, or at least the electoral process, has failed seems inconsistent with the spirit of multiparty democracy.

*Keywords:* Electoral conflict, Democracy, Governance, Multiparty politics, Power-sharing, Zanzibar.

## **Introduction**

Zanzibar consists of the two main islands, Unguja and Pemba, and several smaller islets. The modern history of Zanzibar is generally considered to have started with the

establishment of Omani rule in Zanzibar in 1832, though its history goes back to before the advent of the Christian era. Omani Arabs had pushed the Portuguese colonists into Mozambique, and themselves colonised the East Africa coast and the islands (Gray 1962). When the British occupied East Africa, Zanzibar became a British protectorate in 1890 (Hollingsworth 1953), which lasted until December 1963. Following independence, in April 1964, Zanzibar merged with Tanganyika (now Mainland Tanzania) to form the United Republic of Tanzania. The Articles of Union formally established two governments: the national government of the United Republic of Tanzania, responsible for all union matters and non-union matters on the mainland; and a government in Zanzibar with autonomy for all non-Union matters within its area of jurisdiction, with the exception of those matters exclusively the prerogative of the national government.

Single-party democracy was the norm for both polities (Nurse-Bray 1982) until 1992 when a multiparty system was reinstated. The aim was to create an environment for political participation at all levels of politics, to enhance political accountability of elected representatives, to foster responsible leadership, to aid in consensus building, and to enhance civil liberty (Msekwa 2004). However, in Zanzibar electoral politics has been characterized by conflict between the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the main opposition party Civic United Front (CUF). The climate of mutual distrust and sporadic hostilities has been a key factor in undermining the credibility of democratic reforms in Zanzibar. It has also influenced decisions taken by development partners to freeze aid to Zanzibar on the grounds that the Government was abusing its power by using its security apparatuses to violate the human rights of members of opposition party (Othman et al. 2003; Bashiru and Hanif 2010).

Efforts to resolve this political turmoil have involved both internal and external actors. Two unsuccessful peace accords— Muafaka1 and Muafaka2 – were signed in 1999 and 2001 respectively. Muafaka1 was a Commonwealth brokered agreement that aimed to break the deadlock to enable the Isles to conduct free and fair elections in October 2000 general election. Unfortunately, elections were conducted before the agreement was fully implemented, partly due to the mutual distrust between the two opposing camps (Maundi 2002), and consequently they were not marred by violent incidents. The political impasse reached a critical point in January 2001 when supporters of the Opposition party held a rally to protest against the

elections results and to publicise their key demands: a re-run of the October general election, a revision of the Union and Zanzibar constitutions to encourage wider participation, and an independent status for the Union and Zanzibar Electoral Commissions. However, the rally turned violent following the intervention of the police force and other security organs resulting in more than twenty deaths (CUF 2005). This prompted both the ruling party (CCM) and the main opposition party (CUF) to search for another agreement that would secure a lasting solution. After almost nine months of heated discussion the two parties signed a second peace accord, Muafaka2, on 10 October 2001. The agreement accommodated some of the CUF's demands including restructuring the Zanzibar Electoral Commission and amending Zanzibar's Constitution aimed at ensuring the conditions for free and fair elections. However, a lack of political will and continued mutual distrust led to the failure of the Muafaka2.

The Isles went into its third multiparty elections in 2005. The whole electoral process - from registration of voters to the announcement of results - was covered with an atmosphere of tension. The results were disputed with the incumbent party claiming victory. This led to an intensification of political conflict. It also prompted further (unsuccessful) attempts to resolve the impasse. One important attempt was made by the Union President, Jakaya Kikwete. Soon after 2005 general election, at the opening of the Tanzania's Ninth Parliament in 2006 he promised to find a lasting solution to Zanzibar's political turmoil. Kikwete's position as Chairman of the CCM and President of Tanzania enabled him to instigate indoor meetings between the CCM and CUF Secretary Generals to explore ways to break the political deadlock in Zanzibar. However, the meetings were characterized by a lack of mutual trust and political goodwill, and mutual suspicions between parties and failed to achieve any lasting solution.

Hence it was a surprise in November of 2009, with less than a year to go to the next general election in October 2010, that Zanzibar's President, Amani Karume, and Seif Sharif, three times presidential candidate for the CUF, held a meeting. The outcome of this meeting was an agreement to end their political hostilities and to commit to working together to find a lasting solution to the political impasse. Although the motives behind their meeting and much of the detail for their subsequent agreement remain as secret as they are mysterious, their announcement received favourable responses at national and international levels. This decisive step was

followed by the Zanzibar House of Representatives passing a resolution to request the Government to set the stage to allow a system of power sharing in Zanzibar after the October 2010 election.

### **Power Sharing in Perspective**

The emerging trend of power sharing as an approach to end political conflicts in Africa has generated much debate among scholars (Shivji 2010; Bashiru and Hanif 2010; Nsabimana 2005) and media analysts (Mvungi 2010; Salim 2008). While it has become a fashionable strategy for resolving political conflicts it is also a contentious process. A power sharing system mandated by the people themselves can work effectively and promote good governance, political stability and democracy (Shivji 2010; Muchunguzi 2010; CPA 2009). Power-sharing also involves additional conditions such as agreements to work within agreed policies and rules, to act transparently, to observe the rule of law, to serve the interests of the people, and to allow continuous communication between the power-sharing parties. On the other hand, a power-sharing approach is a result of failed democracies; hence as a solution to remedy the democratic process, especially the electoral process, it is bound to fail because governments formed under this approach are governments of convenience (Mvungi, 2010; Tayari, 2010; Bashiru & Hanif, 2010).

Nonetheless, in Zanzibar, power-sharing has been proposed as an alternative means to resolve the political conflicts that have now existed for over a decade. A House of Representative's resolution (Hansard Report No. HS-18/07/2010) announced that a government of National Unity should be formed after the October 2010 general election. It should be noted that a government of national unity is not the same as a Coalition Government. The latter might emerge when no single party wins an outright majority and hence two or more parties agree to form a government. In contrast a government of national unity is formed from crises such as religious, ethnic and political conflicts, war, famine or a major disaster whereby every one is involved regardless of political affiliations (Shivji 2010; Mvungi 2010). There are historical precedents for governments of national unity. In Britain and some other European nations governments of national unity were formed during the World Wars and Great Depression of 1930s. In South Africa, a government of national unity emerged during the transitional period from apartheid to democratic rule. Sudan had a similar arrangement in 2005 following the peace agreement between North and South. More

recently, Kenya and Zimbabwe formed similar unity governments in 2008 and 2009 respectively as a result of post- election crises. These crises were largely incited by issues of land ownership, rural and urban poverty, and inequality that tore apart grassroots communities and claimed the lives of more than thousand innocent people (Bashiru and Hanif 2010).

In essence, a government of national unity is not intended to be a permanent government. It is usually a transitional arrangement to address particular situations of crisis. Parties involved ostensibly put aside their party-specific programmes and policies to work together to deal with single problem in order to end the crisis. It is essential during this period that efforts be taken to reform institutions which seem to be the source of the crisis. However, there are circumstances in which a government of national unity might be instituted on a more permanent basis (Shivji 2010). For instance in Lebanon, religious differences are not a temporary problem, and a government of national unity is a constitutionally permanent arrangement. Similarly in Malaysia, racial differences between Malay, Chinese and Hindus necessitated a need for a permanent arrangement of a government of national unity. Thus it is not unusual that in Africa power-sharing in the form of a government of national unity has been considered an appropriate means of conflict resolution, despite the differing political objectives of the key actors (Nsabimana 2005).

Bashiru and Hanif (2010: 82) have categorized the trend to power sharing in Africa into two main approaches: (1) the constitutional approach as happened in Rwanda, Burundi and Zimbabwe and (2) an ad-hoc/non-constitutional approach, such as occurred in Kenya in 2008. In Rwanda and Burundi, the constitution explicitly stipulated a power-sharing arrangement between the key actors as a means to rebuild an ethnically divided society and to establish a sustainable liberal democracy (Ndayizeye 2004). In contrast, in Kenya, the National Unity Government was instituted in 2008 without any constitutional back up. The main rival parties in the post- election crisis resorted to power-sharing following intense negotiations mediated by the former UN General Secretary Kofi Annan under the auspices of the Africa Union.

In most instances, power-sharing arrangements aim to overcome the political conflicts in a way that enables the country in question to move forward. Both approaches to power-sharing - the constitutional (Zimbabwe) and the ad-hoc/non-constitutional (Kenya) - have at least achieved significant short-term gains. These

include an end to the immediate political violence, the restoration of basic civil rights, and meeting the humanitarian needs of the displaced people. However, it is still too early to judge if either model will meet its long term objectives of achieving progressive constitutionalism and better mechanisms of political governance to enable the establishment of a free, democratic and transparent system of government in these countries.

### **Power sharing in Zanzibar: Can it work?**

Several explanations have been put forward by scholars to understand the root causes of political conflicts in Zanzibar. Some have argued that the contributing causes of the conflicts can be linked to the power struggles of key politicians, their personality differences, and a clash of party ideologies (Bakari 2001; Onyongo and Nassali 2003; Shivji 2010). Others suggest that the current conflicts in Zanzibar have long term historical roots (Karume, 2004; Mapuri, 1996). As such an ongoing solution of power-sharing may be difficult to sustain. Another explanation looks to the electoral system itself and suggests that Zanzibar is troubled by political conflicts because the elections lack basic standards of fairness and freedoms. On occasions, local and international observers have declared them a sham (ZEMOG 1995; TEMCO 2000).

Conflicts have continued to characterize politics in Zanzibar. Some incidents have become more violent than originally anticipated and imagined with at times bloody, electoral conflicts following all the elections since the inception of multiparty politics. This would indicate that Zanzibar has a recurring political crisis that seems to necessitate compromise in the interest of peace and development. Hence some have even suggested that since the elections results have not provided a winner with a clear-cut majority a government of national unity becomes inevitable (Shivji 2010; CPA 2009). The gains of the previous peace accords, Muafaka1 and Muafaka2, limited though they might be, nevertheless justify the possibility and practicability of using a power-sharing mechanism to end the political conflicts in Zanzibar.

However, some caution needs to be exercised here because the primary task of a government of national unity should always be to work towards a situation in which the source of instability is effectively addressed. Hence there will need to be an emphasis on reforming those institutions which are seen as contributing to the crisis. Both structural and behavioural reforms should be the focus of this process (Shivji 2010). In the workshop at 55<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, the

Speaker of the parliament in Penang (Malaysia), Dato Abdul Halim, argued that for a power-sharing system to function efficiently and effectively the following conditions are needed:

- The formed government should work within agreed policies and rules.
- There must be transparency and the rule of law in running that government
- It should always strive to serve the interest of the people.
- There must be continuous communication among the parties involved in order to avert disputes.

A power-sharing approach is a critical step in the process of rebuilding politically divided societies – at least as a short term solution. In the longer term such an approach may be less effective, especially if we consider some of the counter-arguments to power-sharing.

One counterargument is that power-sharing leading to the creation of some sort of negotiated government could be seen as a betrayal of popular hopes. The will of the electorate is disregarded to address a situation in which the electoral process has resulted in confusion, chaos and widespread suffering. As a result of power-sharing the voice of electorate, as expressed democratically through an electoral process, is not respected. Instead, a form of negotiated government is created which includes the main political adversaries. This means that in most cases a party that has been voted out remains in power. This raises the further problem that a government formed under this arrangement tends not to exercise checks and balances. For example in Kenya, the parliament has no opposition and the government of national unity has taken away the principal of collective responsibility among ministries. The Cabinet itself has grown out of proportion to accommodate every interest thus fuelling increased expenditure which affects the momentum of economic growth: declining in Kenya from 7.1% in 2007 just before the elections to 1.8% after elections in 2008 (CPA 2009: 06). In effect, Kenya has almost become de-facto a single party state

In the case of Zanzibar, using a power-sharing approach to conflict resolution does not only put democratic reforms at risk. It also puts in doubt the very feasibility of democratic reform. Considering the previous attempts to resolve political conflicts in Zanzibar, the lack of mutual trust between the two main rival parties is a key impediment to a workable and successful solution. The failure of previous peace accords was to a large extent a result of a lack of political goodwill and the mutual

suspicions between the parties. Certainly the idea of forming a government of national unity has previously been rejected by the ruling party, allegedly because of its view that the opposition party (CUF) lacked goodwill and tolerance. For a long time the ruling party CCM saw power-sharing as a zero sum game in which it had nothing to gain. Consequently a government of national unity was not likely to succeed in Zanzibar while the CCM held that view of the CUF.

Another difficulty with power sharing in Zanzibar has been continuing acts of violent confrontation and political conspiracy within and between rival parties. Both the CCM and CUF, in order to achieve their political goals, have used strategies that have increased suspicion and hostilities rather than fostering collaborative relations (Salim 2008). For instance, in the course of upgrading the permanent register of voters for the 2010 general election several incidents were reported in which legitimate voters who were mostly believed to be opposition party supporters were intimidated as they tried to register, with many being prevented from registering (Mnyika 2010). This was reported by several independent observers including representatives of Diplomatic Missions in Tanzania and local observers such as TEMCO (Tanzania Election Monitoring Committee). However, no action has been taken so far by the government or the Zanzibar Election Commission to rectify the situation. These acts have occurred in the course of implementing the political agreement of creating the government of national unity, and may severely damage the much needed trust building for the power sharing deal to succeed.

## **Conclusion**

We should reiterate that the power-sharing approach in a situation where the democratic process, or at least the electoral process, has failed is against the spirit of multiparty democracy. If instituted on a permanent basis it likely to fail. In the case of Zanzibar in which the rival parties continue to distrust each other and political hostility and tension still exists, the formation of a government of national unity may enlarge the impasse. If a government of national unity is necessary then it should be a transitional mechanism aimed at facilitating reforms of democratic institutions to enable multiparty democracy to work smoothly. Otherwise it may end up undermining the democratization process in Zanzibar. One issue that might also need to be reformed is the current electoral model of “Winner-Take-All”. Such a model may not be useful in Zanzibar where both major parties win almost the same quantity

of votes in all elections. It may be necessary to develop an electoral system based on proportional representation and the devolution of powers beyond the parliament.

Finally, any attempt to resolve the political conflict in Zanzibar under any auspices can hardly work where the ongoing relationship between the disputants remains one of mutual distrust. It remains to be seen whether the forthcoming elections will prompt the two main parties to live up to their promises of resolving the political violence that has characterized their past electoral activities. It is in the long-term interest of Zanzibar that both parties should find effective ways to work together to restore the lost spirit of trust and build political goodwill so that the fruits of democracy can be enjoyed by all Zanzibaris.

## References

- Bakari, M. (2001) *The Democratisation Process in Zanzibar: A Retarded Transition*. Humburg: Institute of African Affairs.
- Bashiru, A. and T. Hanif. (2010) Power Sharing in East Africa. Paper in the Political Handbook & NGO Calendar (2010) Tanzania. FES Dar es Salaam.
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA]. (2009) Parliamentary Democracy in Dilemma? Paper Presented in the Workshop on Coalition Governments. 4 - 5 October, 2009. Arusha Tanzania.
- Civic United Front [CUF]. (2005) Report on the General Election in Zanzibar. October 30. Zanzibar.
- Gray, J. (1962) *History of Zanzibar from the Middle Ages to 1856*. London: OUP
- Hansard Report No. HS-18/07/2010. House of Representatives of Zanzibar, 28 January, 2010.
- Hollingsworth. (1953) *Zanzibar Under Foreign Office 1890-1913*. London: Macmillan.
- Karume, Shumbana. (2004) "Towards an Understanding Contemporary Conflict in Zanzibar". *EISA. Promote Credible Elections and Democratic Governance in Africa*. Occasional Paper No. 27 December, 2004.
- Mapuri, O. (1996) *Zanzibar: The 1964 Revolution: Achievements and Prospects*. Dar es Salaam: TEMA Publishers.

- Maundi, M. O. (2002) *Reconciliation and Democratic Consolidation in Zanzibar*. Paper in the Political Handbook & NGO Calendar 2002 Tanzania. FES. Dar es Salaam.
- Mnyika, J. (2010) 'Mchakato wa Uboreshaji Daftari na Uhakiki wa Wapiga Kura'. *Mwananchi*. 10 March.
- Msekwa, P. (2004) *The Transition to Multipartyism in Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press.
- Mchunguzi, T. (2010) 'Karume Aiachia Zanzibar Historia Mpya'. *The Nipashe News*. 3 February 2010.
- Mvungi, Sengodo. (2010) 'Inclusive Government in Zanzibar'. *The Guardian*. 17 February. Dar es Salaam. Tanzania.
- Ndayizeye, D. (2004) *Promulgation of the Constitution of the Republic of Burundi*. International Documentation Network on the Great African Lakes Region.
- Nsabimana, C.G. (2005) The Concept of Power Sharing in the Constitutions of Burundi and Rwanda. Masters Thesis, Faculty of Law. University of Pretoria.
- Nurse-Bray, P. (1982) 'Consensus and Community: The Theory of African One-Party Democracy', pp. 96-111 in Graeme Duncan. (ed.) *Democratic Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oliver, R. & G. Mathew. (1963) *History of East Africa*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Onyango, J. O. and M. Nassali. (2003) *Constitutionalism and Political Stability in Zanzibar: The Search for a New Vision*. Dar es Salaam: FES.
- Othman, H. and R. Mukandala, R. Makaramba and Per Tidamand. (2003) "Zanzibar Good Governance Strategic Plan." *A Consultants' Report for UNDP and Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar*, March 2003, Zanzibar.
- Shivji, I. (2010) 'Government of National Unity'. A Paper Presented in the Seminar on the Power Sharing in Zanzibar at the State University of Zanzibar. 14 May 2010. Zanzibar.
- Salim, S. (2008) 'Historia ya Muafaka Bado Haijabadilika'. *Tanzania Daima News*. 6 April. Dar es Salaam. Tanzania.
- Tanzania Elections Monitoring Committee [TEMCO]. (2005) Report of the 2005 Zanzibar Election. University of Dar es Salaam. Dar es Salaam.
- Tanzania Elections Monitoring Committee [TEMCO]. (2000) Report of the 2000 Elections in Tanzania. University of Dar es Salaam. Dar es Salaam.

Tayari, E. (2010) 'Zanzibar Unity Government is not a Lasting Solution'. *Business Times*. 29 January.

Zanzibar Elections Monitoring Group [ZEMOG]. (1995) Report for the 1995 Zanzibar Elections.