

Public Funding Of Political Parties In Africa

By Dr. Samuel Fambom

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Introduction

The year 1990 marks the onset of the democratisation process in Africa, a new era that aims to break away from a political past of one-party systems and military regimes, and that promises to bring free and pluralistic elections in the continent. The holding of democratic elections requires financial resources, which are not in abundance in Africa because of the low level of economic development.

Today, the funding of political process in Africa is a burning issue both for the national actors and for their partners in the democratic development of the continent for the consolidation of democracy requires as a precondition the enhancement of the capacities of the political actors for action which, in the African case, can only be achieved by an equitable allocation of public resources among the actors. In the continent the electoral playing field is more often than not skewed in favour of the party in power due to the fact that it controls the human, material resources of the states including the media (which are so necessary during election time). Also the incumbent party in power may interfere with the private media where it exists. As a consequence, the funding structure of parties is definitely biased in favour of the incumbent party either because of the regulations inherent in public funding of political parties and elections or because of the absence of separation between the State and the party in power.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the funding of elections and political parties in Africa. More specifically we focus our interest on public funding of political parties as to their impact on the consolidation of democracy in Africa.

Political Parties in African States

As African democracies pass from their transition phase to their consolidation phase it becomes crucial to build institutions likely, not only to support policies favourable to the reduction of poverty, but also to put an end to the dominance of the executive and the abuses of state authority. This is one of the most important reasons why viable political parties have to be built. These parties constitute the engines of democratic political systems for they incite competition between societal groups and interests.

In Africa three types of party systems exist. The first one is a dominant party system, which has a tendency to win an excessive number of seats in the legislature and to remain continually in power. Such parties exist for instance in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania,

Togo, etc. In this type of a system opposition faces many problems such as the ruling party grabs the resources of the State for its own account, lack of access to public funds for electoral processes, small private donations in comparison to the incumbent party, exclusive control of media by the State. This situation skews the electoral field in favour of the incumbent party and to the detriment of the opposition and reduces its capacity to portray itself and to function as a countervailing power or a viable alternative to the incumbent power. As a consequence, an increase in the resources of opposition would help to create a balance of political forces likely to improve the structure of competition between political actors.

The second and a common type of a party system found in Africa is a fragmented party system. This system is made up of a large number of opposition parties, which are divided. This tends to reinforce the power of the incumbent party and offer no real opposition in the legislature. Thus an increase in the financial capacity of the opposition could in principle improve the quality of democracy in these States; a drawback would be the perpetuation of fragmented party systems.

Lastly, is the weak party system. Four reasons explain this weakness: i) inability of small parties to survive over time; ii) difficulty in establishing a network of durable organisations across the national territory; iii) lack of resources; and iv) incapacity to develop a comprehensive vision of the political situation.

The Concept of Political Finance

The concept of political funding refers to the manner in which political parties and individual candidates who seek to get elected to political office gather funds for electoral campaigns and in the case of political parties seek to maintain themselves as organisations.

Political finance is a complex phenomenon to grasp. The subject is not very transparent, which makes it difficult to estimate its effect on the political process, especially the election results. To address this problematic phenomenon, some countries have introduced some kind of regulations such as disclosure regulations, the prohibition of certain kinds of contributions, the prohibition of certain kinds of expenditure, limits on contributions (which are intended to reduce the possibilities for a donor to exert excessive influence on a candidate or a party), and spending ceilings (which are resources directed at overcoming the inequalities between parties and candidates, at slowing down the rise in the costs of doing politics, and for limiting the possibilities of abusive influences and corruption). These regulations vary between countries depending on whether they aim to regulate party funding in general (including routine or external party activities) or whether they are, on the contrary, directed specifically at the costs of electoral campaigns.

In Africa, funding rules almost do not exist. Nonetheless, money plays a predominant role in African politics hence the urgency for formulating legislations likely to regulate

political finance in African democracies. These regulations must be formulated in a manner to arouse the democratic spirit rather than its violation.

Public Funding Of Political Parties

The issue of public funding of political parties has been debated for a long time in old democracies. Three main arguments militate in favour of political parties. The first is that political parties must be treated as public services for the same reason as other services whose products are ideas, political socialisation and the renewal of the political class (Pere, 1998). The second argument is that the public funding of political parties provides a living space to the opposition, which of a nature to encourage the spread and diversification of ideas, the opening up of debates and political alternation. According to the third argument, the public funding of political parties enable to respect a basic democratic principle, that of equality, by evening up the chance of the participants in the electoral game. In this respect, the State may limit the spending of parties and candidates or even prohibit some of them (e.g. prohibitions of bribes to individual voters, drinks and meals to voters etc...). It may also limit the contributions received by parties (e.g. restrictions on the amount an individual may give) and disclose their source or prohibit certain contributions (e.g. Regulation or restriction of political contributions by corporations, unions, foreign organisations or citizens).

Those who argue against public funding of political parties are often of the political right. They argue that grassroots participation must be encouraged for the basic characteristics of democratic parties is that they are voluntary organisation which depend on the support and effort of their members. Consequently, they should neither depend on the State nor on the vast contributions of the private sector. Their funding should be based on large number of small contributions (ACE, 2000 – Traduction). The participation to political activities in a multiparty system does not provide favours like in one-party systems where adhesion to the governing party provides material advantages. The leaders of democratic parties in multiparty systems must attract followers who will offer their support for idealistic motives. Consequently, it is important for democratic parties to receive from ordinary member now only financial contributions, but also some assistance in tasks of electoral propaganda (ACE, 2000 – Traduction).

In the new African democracies, where the majority of the citizens are poor, it is difficult for political parties to gather significant amounts of funds from contributions of their members. Under these conditions, the only sources of finance available are assistance from foreign donor and the subsidies of public moneys.

The availability of appropriate funding for the mobilisation and educational activities by political parties is extremely important in all democratic countries. In Africa however, the issue of the funding of political parties has not really been debated seriously in the social and economic context of the continent. Today only a reduced number of African countries dispose of legislation deliberately governing political party funding. Moreover, situations vary from one State to another. Some States do not grant any financial assistance to parties thus forcing them to depend entirely on private funding (e.g.

Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Mauritania (Schikonge, 2000)). On the other hand other States directly fund political parties most often on electoral performance (e.g. South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Namibia (since 1997), Mozambique, Schikonge 2000).

Table 1 below summarises the manner in which the different elements of political finance apply to African democracies.

Table 1. Public subsidies for parties in African democracies where funding has been provided, by year of introduction, recipient, allocation criteria and amount.

Country	Year of Introduction	Recipient	Basic Allocation criteria (Amount for each party/candidate)	Total amount
Benin	Law (90023)	-Parliamentary candidates -Presidential candidates	Reimbursement of campaign expenses for successful candidates. (Rule for proportional distributed funding not implemented) Candidates must win more than 10% in presidential elections	Decided by president decree
Burkina Faso	1997	-Parties election campaign -Central party org.	- 50% distributed proportionally among the parties in the National Assembly, - 50% to parties with candidates in at least 5 of the 45 provinces - Unspecified support between elections	US\$380.000
Cameroon	1990	Political parties		
Chad US\$10.000 for each new party	1993	Grant to new parties	US\$ 10.000 for each new party	
Egypt central Party org.	N.A.	Central party org.	All registered parties (US\$29.000 pr party)	
Equatorial Guinea	N.A.	-Presidential candidates -Central party org.	-All participants (US\$ 30.000 each) -All parties (US\$ 8.900 each)	
Gabon	1990	Central party org.	All parties with a candidate in each	US\$ 37.700

			constituency	
Morocco	N.A.	Parties' election campaign	The parties receive 20% before the end of candidate registration, 30% is given to parties based on the number of candidates filed, 25% is given to parties based on the number of votes obtained by each party in every district, and finally 25% is distributed based on the number of seats won.	Total amount to be decided by Prime Minister (1997: US\$ 13.6 million)
Mozambique	1999	-Central party org. -Presidential candidates	-1/3 distributed equally among presidential candidates, -1/3 proportionally to parties represented in Parliament, -1/3 to all participating parties based on number of approved candidates	US\$ 340.000 to the two largest parties
Namibia	1997	Central party org.	Funding confined to parliamentary parties	
Seychelles US\$ 1.5 million	1996	Central party org.	Parties that nominated candidates for the preceding election, based on percentage of the votes	US\$ 1.5 million
South Africa	1996	Central party org.	Funding limited to parties in National Assembly or in a Provincial Legislature. A sum divided equally among parties + another sum based on proportional parliamentary representation.	US\$ 9 million
Tanzania	-1992 -1995 -1996	Law not implemented US\$ 9.600 for	Support for parties between elections, proportional to	US\$ 10 million for 1996 – 2000

		each presidential candidate US\$ 1.900 pr. Constituency for campaign costs + US\$ 1.900 for each constituency won towards administrative costs	parliamentary representation	
Zimbabwe	-1992 -1997	-Central party org -Central party org	-Must hold 15 seats in the National Assembly to receive funds	-Funds given to parties receiving 5% in previous election

N.A.: Not available

Source: Extract from Harald Mathisen and Lars Svasand (2000): Funding political parties in emerging African democracies: What role for Norway? Report R 2002: 6, Chr. Michelsen Institute Development Studies and Human Rights.

In many African countries, the conditions for political parties to qualify for public funding are ambiguous. In Morocco, the Prime Minister decides whether or not subsidies will be granted. In Benin, and in Tanzania the law regulating subsidies to political parties were partially applied or were not at all. The funding of candidates and parties does not necessary mean that this funding will be available long before electoral campaign. In Equatorial Guinea for instance, all the candidates had received US\$ 20, 000 that were distributed late; then 4 days before the election they were given an additional US\$ 10, 000. The next day, opposition candidates retired from the election (ibid, source Table 1).

Sometimes, it seems that the government introduces public subsidies in a way that does not encourage the institutionalisation of political parties. The case of Gabon is revealing in this respect. In effect, during a national conference in Gabon in March 1990, the delegates were invited to establish political parties. More than 70 parties were formed only to disappear after receiving State subsidies never to be seen again (Saffu and Ohman by Mathisen and Svasand L. (2000)).

In Africa, political funding is generally under-regulated and it is difficult to estimate the amount of public funds and other forms of revenues political parties dispose of. In less than one country in five, there are laws regulating the mobilisation of funds by political parties. When the latter are allowed to receive (or not) grants from abroad, it still remains that their amount, audit procedures, sanctions for violating regulations do not really exist. In countries where some regulations exist, political actors have always tended to get around them. Also in countries with provisions for public funding, there exist

inconsistent and incomplete regulations. Hence the need to fill this gap by adopting new legislation on funding in order to encourage the emergence of sound policies.

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