



SEMINAR SERIES PAPER 1

“The Electoral Process in Africa: Convergence and Divergence in the 2007 Kenyan and Nigerian Elections”

By Professor Okello Oculi

The need to explore various perspectives on issues within and outside Africa led to the introduction of the periodic Seminar Series by the Centre for Democracy and Development to introduce its seminar series. The first of the seminars organized by CDD and co-funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa took place at Rockview Hotel Abuja on the 1st of February 2008.

The first paper of the seminar was on the electoral process in Africa, and was delivered by Professor Okello Oculi, a renowned east Africa academic and civil society activist based in Nigeria. The seminar held

at a time when the outcome of elections in Nigeria, Kenyan and other African countries left so many questions on the progress electoral democracy in Africa begging for answers.

While the prevalent notion in the media, especially those of the West attribute the failure of the electoral process in Africa to the inconsistencies of politicians, divides along ethnic lines etc. Professor Oculi asserted that, there are deeper factors responsible for the failure of elections in not just Kenya, but the rest of Africa as well.

According to professor Oculi events in Kenya could only be comprehended with a narrative and an analysis of Kenyan history. The outcome of the elections in Kenya and the violence that followed were not just an issue of ethnic rivalries as was reported, the contending issue here was land, he said. His paper was divided into three sections, Land and people, Politics, Economy and the demand for change.

To drive his point home, Professor Oculi, showed how the British during the period of colonialism using land orchestrated

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the divides that created tensions between, the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luo, Massai, Pokot, and other smaller groups that eventually came to a boil following the announcement of the result of elections in 2007 in Kenya.

Land, during the colonial period became a major factor of divide. This was because the British to achieve their own objectives laid down a host of policies that took land away from the indigenous people. The Kalenjins, for instance, had their land taken away from them; the Kikuyu known for their hard work were settled on these lands. The Luyha, adjudged trustworthy, were closer to the colonialists. The resettlement scheme in the Rift Valley created the rift between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin who were originally settled there.

The divides created by the colonialists laid down the factions between the dominant political figures in Kenya at the time and continues till date. Professor Oculi gave a background of the intrigues that ensued between people like Jomo Kenyatta (Gikuyu), Tom Mboya (Luo), Daniel arap Moi (Kalenjin) on one side and Odinga Odinga (Luo) on the other. The actions of these people had by 2007 created what he called an “established technology to kill along ethnic divides for the reasons of land and divisive politics of Kenyan leaders”.

The leadership of President Daniel arap Moi led to mismanagement of the Kenyan elections, nepotism; mass unemployment all increased the divide among the people of Kenya. From 1988 a lot of groups had emerged

that were challenging his government. The call for change became persistent from then onwards and by 2007, the stage was set for an election with so many undercurrents that eventually spilt into the violence that rocked the streets of Kenya.

The election itself was enmeshed in a lot of inconsistencies, the actions of the different parties left much to be desired. The actions of the electoral commission chairman, the announcement of the results by Raila Odinga before the commission and the swearing in ceremony of Mwai Kibaki all left much to be desired about the process. The result of these was the wanton burning and killings that dominated media reports around the world subsequently.

For Professor Oculi, it is important to look deeper into the

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outcomes of elections to fully comprehend the turn of events. He stated this point as follows “We cannot take elections as they are on the day they are taking place, one week or one year before they take place... Elections are part of a

historical process and they may be part of a strategy of managing change by the elite. Or they take place on top of those strategies”.

The end of his presentation drew a varying range of

comments, questions and observations from participants, to which he responded and made a case for civil society in Nigeria to look at the events in Kenya in view of the fallout of 2007 general elections in the country.