

Tanzania's Road to Multi-Party Democracy; Focus on a Single Mission's Efforts

INTRODUCTION

This case-study attempts to illustrate democracy development support from the standpoint of the activities of one diplomatic Mission in a country in profound but peacefully realized transformation. It examines the experience of the Canadian High Commission in the early 1990s in Tanzania, which was then transforming its governance from being a centrally directed socialist state into a multi-party democracy. Of course, the missions of several democracies were active in the effort to assist democratic and economic development in Tanzania, and the case study does not mean to highlight Canadian efforts and neglect the importance of others. But the fact that the Canadian Mission geared virtually its whole country program to the holistic task of democratic development including thereby juridical and economic reform, makes it a useful case to outline from the perspective of a multi-faceted use of the "Diplomat's toolbox."

Background

Synopsis: Tanganyika became a one-party, centrally-directed, socialist state at independence from Britain in 1962. In 1964 Tanganyika amalgamated with Zanzibar to form Tanzania. But the single ruling party governance model endured for 30 years, with a variation in name if not in method for Zanzibar. In 1992, in a shift in governance under the paternal eye of Tanzania's legendary first President, the aging Julius Nyerere, Tanzania amended its constitution to allow the formation of a multi-party democracy and a free market economy. This was as dramatic a development in Tanzania's political narrative as had been the struggle of the younger Nyerere to secure national self-determination thirty years earlier. The Canadian High Commission was one of several Missions in Tanzania to try to accompany the Tanzanian government and people in their voluntary and peaceful transformation.

Pressures for Change

By the mid-1980s, the Tanzanian government was under considerable stress from a collapsing subsistence economy which had pushed the government to look to foreign aid for survival. An informal civil society began to emerge. Branches formed around discontent over the need for greater political freedoms, and more generalized economic benefits. The nascent de facto opposition was awarded significant validation when ex-President Julius Nyerere spoke out in February 1990, and himself challenged the exclusive legitimacy of the ruling party, the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) on the grounds it had lost touch with the people. As well, a donor community fatigued by ever increasing African needs had, under the aegis of the World Bank, argued that "underlying the litany of African development problems is a crisis of governance." The Tanzanian government like others in Africa responded to the growing combined internal and external pressures for change. Tanzania under the enormous influence and stature of Nyerere, one of the giants of Africa's emergence from colonialism, initiated its first, albeit reluctant, steps to reversing its unique African model of one party socialism.

In February 1991, the government appointed Chief Justice Francis Nyalali to head a commission to consider whether Tanzania should operate in a multi-party environment and to report back by December.

The Nyalali Commission's controversial report recommended that Tanzania indeed establish a multi-party democracy, and identified 40 pieces of "repressive" legislation which should be amended to facilitate this move. It also recommended a timetable for the transition, together with the establishment of a body to

oversee the transition process, which would include a redrafting of the constitution. It would also require a considerable campaign of public information to engage citizens in the exercise of their new responsibilities.

There was immediate and significant opposition within the governing party, the CCM, to the reach of the report's recommendations. Though he had agreed to a study of options, President Mwinyi was widely quoted in the local press as opposing a decisive move to multi-party democracy. However, Nyerere, who had stepped down from the Presidency in 1985, remained Chairman of the CCM. He chaired a Party Congress which under his leadership indeed unanimously accepted the Nyalali Commission's recommendation to move to multi-party democracy. The constitution was amended accordingly in February, 1992.

These events took place against a background of similar changes in neighboring Kenya, where, however, amendment of the constitution to allow for multi-party democracy was taken more vividly in reluctant response to pressure from Western donors and especially the World Bank.

The Initiation of Multi-Party Politics

A Political Parties Act was passed in June, 1992, repealing the single-party clause in the Tanzanian constitution. There was by this time an abundant number of groups keen to take on the mantle of political parties in a multi-party system to press their concerns for improved economic structures, greater transparency in public information, and business, consumer, and personal freedoms.

But the learning curve was very steep. As there had been no history of multi-party politics in the country, there was no experience in Tanzania of a political, yet loyal opposition to government. All the new parties were led by dissidents from the CCM, which had been the only arena where politics was practiced. Some had been expelled because of policy differences with the ruling party; others had simply left, dissatisfied with the current regime. All had one thing in common: they opposed the control of the current ruling elite of the CCM.

For its part, the CCM's own reflexes had been shaped by the long experience of one-party rule, during which opposition to the CCM became equated with opposition to the government and therefore considered virtually treasonous. This instinctive hostility among the ruling elite to the notion of political opposition remained a problem for some years.

In its wariness about the emerging forces of opposition, the government was particularly conscious of the external pressures which had allegedly played such a part in the Kenyan shift to a multi-party system. Tanzanian authorities were allergic therefore to the idea of outside assistance to new political parties, which they deemed to be external interference in their sovereign domestic affairs. Financial support to the new parties from anyone but local supporters was risky and unwelcome.

The multi-party competitive outcome was very one-sided, however. During the one-party system, the state and the CCM party had become financially one and the same. After the new constitution was adopted, the government and the CCM became separate entities and public financing of political parties ceased, but not before the CCM was provided with significant private sector assets and investments to finance its activities. The fledgling opposition parties struggled to make ends meet.

RESOURCES AND ASSETS OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

In this climate of uncertainty and suspicion, Canada, along with other Western donors and like-minded countries, responded cautiously, welcoming the move to multi-party democracy, but deferring to the sensitivities of the government. Tanzania had been a major partner in development assistance over the years. Julius Nyerere had been something of an African political soul mate of Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. So, while the High Commission had the potential for favorable influence, there was little room at senior levels of the Foreign Ministry for much attention to events in Dar es Salaam. But in that the Tanzanian government had publicly welcomed the appearance of the new political parties, High Commissioner Patricia Marsden-Dole and Deputy High Commissioner Terry Jones decided it would be in line with the interests of both governments to do all the High Commission could do to encourage the transition to multiparty democracy, short of providing financial support to political parties themselves.

APPLICATIONS OF THE DIPLOMATIC TOOLBOX

The period of support for transformation to a multi-party democracy covered in this case study was roughly from February 1992 to June 1994.

The Golden Rules

In moving to support the emergence of political parties, and in contributing to other areas of transformation in Tanzania, such as the emergence of independent media, and reform of the justice system, the High Commission was deeply conscious of the need to defer to Tanzanian realities and preoccupations. It involved a lot of listening and understanding rather than lecturing.

Sharing with other members of the diplomatic community from democratic countries was generally unstructured, except for the “Western Donors Group” which met regularly to discuss and very loosely coordinate development assistance to the Tanzanian government. Direct assistance to civil society had not in the early 1990s taken on the significance it has today, but there were information exchanges among western partners as to local partners, so as to avoid duplication. On election monitoring, there was considerable division of labor among Canadian, British and French diplomats in particular. As mentioned below, democratic missions also made joint demarches on some critical issues of press independence.

Getting to the Truth

The Tanzanian constitution provided for freedom of speech for the press. However, various laws, such as the Newspaper and Broadcasting Acts, limited the effective functioning of the media, and the government, through the Registrar of Newspapers, subtly pressured journalists to practice self-censorship.

The Canadian High Commission believed that a free and vigorous media was an essential element for informing a society moving to multi-party politics. The media could provide critical comment, advice, popular feedback and a measure of accountability to a society and a government feeling their way during an uneven transitional period, and yet being unused to robust public debate.

Before the Nyalali Commission’s report was published, journalists were very circumspect about being seen meeting with diplomats. In the more liberal atmosphere which prevailed after the 1991 Report, they thawed.

Accordingly, High Commissioner Marsden-Dole and Deputy Terry Jones met regularly and publicly with independent journalists. This bolstered their credibility and status. It also supported their independence.

At the meetings held at the High Commission, or Canadian diplomats' homes, there was some discussion of how parties and the media could be in a position of loyal opposition. As well, Canadian officers provided objective information on international events and reports from international organizations which were in the public domain but not generally accessible to Tanzanian media, in those pre-internet days. Current reports from the World Bank, the IMF and the Paris Club were particularly appreciated, as often the reports dealt with matters relevant to the Tanzanian economic situation.

As part of the political "re-education" of the society after the reform of basic laws and criminal justice proceedings, Chief Justice Nyalali drafted a series of radio talks on the rights of the individual in Tanzania. Radio talks were important, particularly in rural areas, where many were illiterate and where access to newspapers was not readily available. The Canadian High Commission paid for these radio talks to be broadcast across the country.

Working with the Government

The Canadian High Commission also dialogued with the government to promote acceptance of the right of an informed media to critique government policies. The period of adaptation was not always smooth. In the increasing relative freedom felt by the media in the post-Nyalali period, reporting became laced with opinion and the independent press began to comment on matters which had previously been taboo, including providing scurrilous details of the President's personal life, and detailing the ostentatious private wealth of very senior government officials. The authorities responded by arresting the journalists and charging them with treason. The High Commission remonstrated with authorities, proposing that inflammatory media reports could be dealt with as libel in a democratic society. The officials had the honesty to respond that the problem was that most reports were substantially correct.

Given the increasing license felt by the media to report on topics hitherto off-limits, Western missions feared the government would react by instituting controls on the recently awarded press freedoms. In this situation, High Commissioner Marsden-Dole led an informal diplomatic demarche of Western Embassies on the government, urging freedom of the press and transparency in government operations. Whether the government was influenced by the demarche was not clear, but no new controls were implemented, and the treason charge against the offending journalists was dropped. For its part, the press constrained itself thereafter, limiting its reports and comments to non-personal items and government policies.

Reaching Out

In order to bolster the confidence and public credibility of the new political parties, Canadian diplomats made a point of being seen in public with their new leaders, calling on them in their offices and receiving them officially at the Canadian High Commission. During these meetings, officers made available pertinent current material, including reports and studies issued by international organizations such as the World Bank, which could inform and instruct their policies and programs. Again, while this material was in the public domain and often relevant to the situation in Tanzania, even ruling Tanzanian politicians were unfamiliar with the existence and utility of these important documents.

The situation provided opportunities for a convening and facilitating role for outside diplomats. The plethora of new parties which sprang up, compounded by the parties' lack of experience and organizational skills, divided and weakened their effectiveness. For example, without any specifically Canadian agenda, but in an effort to encourage them to cooperate with each other, the High Commission convened new party leaders in the home of the Deputy High Commissioner, where they could meet, compare notes and possibly even agree to collaborate without the pressure of an attendant press or the necessity of preparing a public statement on their deliberations. The ruling party, the CCM, was invited to

participate but chose not to do so. However, they stationed officers of Tanzania's Intelligence Service at the entrance to the CHC property, to note the names of those who did attend.

In the end, all 24 new parties declared their intention nonetheless to pursue independent courses. However, few of the new leaders had any experience in running a political party, though they had previously been members of the CCM and had in some case even held cabinet posts. In order to facilitate the organization and operation of political parties, the High Commission sponsored a day-long workshop for the new leaders. Ed Broadbent, former head of a social-democratic national political party in Canada and President of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, led a seminar in the mechanics of creating, funding and operating a political party. The High Commission made sure to seek the moral support of the CCM for the project, but in the end the ruling party only sent an observer to monitor the proceedings.

Showcasing was a strong representational emphasis as well. In late 1991, while he was researching and preparing his report, Chief Justice Nyalali visited Canada, at the initiative of the High Commission, to meet with his Canadian counterpart, parliamentarians and federal government officials. Similarly, the Mission proposed and organized a working visit to Canada of the Speaker of the Tanzanian House and other officers of Parliament to explore with counterparts in Canada the functioning of Parliament under the new multi-party conditions.

Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Under the one party system, village elders in rural areas judged local criminal and civil cases, advised by a CCM appointed District Commissioner (DC), who held the deciding vote. The organization of society in groups of ten families under the helpful/watchful eye of a CCM leader – the ten cell leader – gave additional political weight to the interventions of the DC. Over time justice became more political, arbitrary, and unfair for all but those able to bribe the local CCM leaders.

Justice Francis Nyalali played a significant role in changing this system. He declared that political reform to a multi-party system would help ensure that the administration of justice would no longer be in the exclusive hands of one party's politicians.

This became a major emphasis in advising and training. The High Commission worked diligently with both the Chief Justice and the Solicitor General to get the government's agreement to request from a variety of donors the funds needed for reform of the justice system: the training of judges and magistrates; physical upgrading of principal courts; secure holding to prevent tampering with court files; provision of law books, etc.

The Canadian High Commission gave physical stature to the effort via a project to restore an important court house in the middle of Dar es Salaam, which helped to demonstrate the pre-eminence of the rule of law to Tanzanian society. Justice Nyalali used the occasion of the re-opening of this court house to make a nation-wide radio address to give voice to the reasonable expectation of Tanzanian citizens for fair and impartial justice.

Election Monitoring

The first multi-party election held in Tanzania was a by-election held in a rural constituency. The Canadian High Commission, working together with the British High Commission, monitored this landmark election, as did the French Embassy. Canadian, British and French diplomats were prominently present at polling stations in a public show of support for the elections and to verify they were free and

fair. Local officials were familiar with election procedures, as Tanzania had held elections since its independence, so the move to multi-party elections on a small scale was not difficult.

Running a general multi-party election was another matter. The government established an Electoral Commission to organize and run the first multi-party general election scheduled for 1995. The Western Donors Group provided financial support and information to the Electoral Commission including visits for electoral officials to meet with electoral commissions of donor countries.

The Unique Case of Zanzibar

Developments in Zanzibar followed a separate track, as in Tanzanian political life, the multi-island political culture of Zanzibar was always treated as a case apart. The terms of the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar permitted the Zanzibar Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) to operate within the one-party system of the mainland. Over time it morphed into a repressive version of the CCM. With the advent of a multi-party system in 1992, one new party, the Civic United Front (CUF) led by Seif Sharif Hamad, established itself as a threat to the ruling CCM, particularly on the smaller northern Zanzibar island of Pemba.

Western embassies found it very difficult to work with new political parties in Zanzibar and almost impossible on the island of Pemba, where its remoteness, closed culture and political system made outside assistance all but impossible. Nevertheless, it was in Zanzibar (and particularly Pemba which was a stronghold of the leader of the CUF) that the multi-party system established itself and posed the greatest challenge to the ruling CCM party in Zanzibar, to the extent of holding the CCM in Zanzibar to a 1% margin of victory in the first multi-party election in 1995. The CUF claimed widespread voter rigging and, as a result, donor aid was suspended. Unfortunately, the 2000 election was annulled, due to irregularities in 16 out of 50 Zanzibar constituencies. Commonwealth observers declared the election a total shambles. Despite these problems, it was clear by then that popular support for multi-party politics was established in Zanzibar.

Reforming the Economy

At the same time that multiparty politics were in the air, so was the policy of enhancing the fledgling private sector. The World Bank had given its first loan to the Tanzanian government in 1986 with a view to encouraging market-based economic activity, and by 1990 small street-side enterprises were evident, especially after liberalization of the regime in nearby trading partner South Africa. Most other donors followed suit, though China remained a major economic partner of Tanzania. The Canadian aid program was providing funds for microfinance schemes, while continuing to support the improvement and greater responsiveness of state enterprises such as the railway, the Hanang wheat farms, the water supply to Dar, the electricity grid, etc. The High Commission was actively engaged in working with Canadian resource extraction companies to change the many restrictive regulations and institutional attitudes which had previously blocked foreign investment. Public accountability and the rule of law were slowly accepted as essential for both political and economic reform.

CONCLUSION: MULTI-PARTY POLITICS HERE TO STAY

Tanzania has continued its progress. The general elections of 2005 showed that multi-party politics were well established across Tanzania. Ten parties put forward a candidate for President. The CCM's candidate Jakaya Kikwete won with 80+% of the votes. The runner-up was the CUF candidate with 11+%, a respectable showing. In the Tanzanian Parliament the CCM won 70% of the seats; the remaining seats were split among six opposition parties. In Zanzibar the CCM won 30 seats, the CUF won 19.

Multi-party democracy developed in relatively remote Zanzibar with a minimum of outside moral and financial encouragement and assistance. In the rest of Tanzania, diplomatic missions played a constructive supportive role which no doubt helped create a framework in which multi-party democracy could begin to grow. What is clear is that after a history of 30 years of one-party rule, the Tanzanian people chose and forged a nationally-adapted governance system of multi-party democracy, a free media, private sector economic management, and the rule of law. That great success is the achievement of the Tanzanians themselves.