



Global and Regional Issues in Democracy Building: Perspective on Recent Trends

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1. Global Context on Issues of Democracy Building

- The enormous challenges involved in rebuilding functioning states from above and outside, have absorbed much of the energy and resources of the international community.
- Have also alerted public opinion as never before to the complexities of building democracy.
- The recognition that democratic development is a non-linear process.
- Problems of security, legitimacy, local ownership, the interplay of cultural, religious and democratic values.



Global Context on Issues of Democracy Building

- The importance of the “process” as well as design of political institutions, and the need for a very long term perspective.
- Also the importance of the context. Can't just transfer institutions - they will work differently in different political and institutional environments.
- The approaches to democracy building and conflict management need to be based on extensive dialogue and consensus building with local stakeholders.



Global Context on Issues of Democracy Building

- **The need for comparative experience in other situations is very relevant.**
- **Also the democratic governance must be seen to have an instrumentalist value and relevance to improving human development in order for stakeholders to buy-into the culture of democracy.**
- **A caveat is necessary here. It is that, while the core tenets of democratic governance have universal validity, the democracy a nation chooses to develop depends on its history and circumstances.**



2. The African Diversity: Regional Trends

- Africa with all its problems of poverty, debt, HIV-Aids, armed conflict etc, has managed against great odds to move forward in many respects in the last few years.
- Despite continuing imperfections in elections and chronic corruption, there appears to be a strong popular demand for more and better democracy.
- The establishment of the African Union, and particularly the NEPAD initiative, has focussed the minds of political elites on the business of responsible economic and political governance and a new sense of collective responsibility is developing.



The African Diversity: Regional Trends

NEPAD has several unique features, but the most important and relevant to progress towards good governance in Africa are:

- **The recognition that economic/corporate, political governance, peace and security are necessary preconditions for Africa's development strategy.**
- **The pledge by African leaders to be accountable to one another and to their own people.**
- **The emphasis on Africa's ownership of the development process.**
- **The establishment of African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)**
- **The demonstration of the collective political will of African leaders and their commitment to mutual accountability.**



The African Diversity: Regional Trends

- In the continent the pattern that is emerging is that, an overwhelming number of countries have and are transforming their regime types from the authoritarian variant to a more pluralistic type.
- Constitutionally guaranteed provisions for periodic elections and commitment to civil and political liberties.
- Effective transfer of power and renewal of leadership.



The African Diversity: Regional Trends

- In addition, transparent electoral processes and a more inclusive political system in which minorities and previously disadvantaged groups have gained access to elected and appointed offices.
- The more inclusive the political space becomes, the more the likelihood of sustaining the gains made in democratic governance.
- The issue of deepening democracy remains a serious concern, given the socio-political challenges facing the continent.



The Arab World Diversity: Regional Trends

- The last few years have seen concerted efforts within the Arab world to forge ahead with reform including political, constitutional, legislative, human rights, and women participation.
- More and more countries have sought to liberalize their socio-economic and political systems and create space for political parties, media, parliaments, and non-state actors to contribute to national dialogue on governance and democracy.
- In this context, electoral processes, women's participation and political parties have emerged as central issues in political reform in the Arab world.



The Arab World Diversity: Regional Trends

- The emergence of a pan-Arab and trans-national satellite television (*e.g. Al Jazeera*) and radio channels have given unprecedented impetus to internal pressures and advocacy for democratic change.
- Not all Arab governments have heeded these calls and those who seem sympathetic to such calls have opted for a gradualist approach.
- Elections in the region have taken place only intermittently due to political instability and internal disputes and in many countries elections are non-competitive and only limited to parliaments and municipal councils thus excluding the executive.



The Arab World Diversity: Regional Trends

- It was not until recently that Egypt – widely considered a pace setter in the region – introduced constitutional reform to allow multi-candidate presidential elections and that Saudi Arabia introduced municipal elections for the first time, although excluding women from participating.
- Countries like Lebanon and Palestine also recorded free and competitive elections in the last few years.



The Arab World Diversity: Regional Trends

- **The Arab World stands out as a region where democratic progress has been slower and more limited than in other parts of the world.**
- **Nevertheless, during recent years the gradual appearance of encouraging and positive signs in the direction of democratisation and political liberalisation can be observed in a number of Arab countries.**



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

- **Democracy and good governance encompasses a range of actions aimed at creating more open, participatory societies, and promoting greater accountability and transparency in public affairs.**
- **In addition, there should be a strong adherence to the rule of law in a manner that protects personal and civil liberties and gender equity.**
- **Also democracy and good governance cannot be sustained in an environment that is characterised by exclusive politics.**
- **The opening up of the political space, including the introduction of multiparty politics and allowing a free press to operate, has raised the level of political accountability, as well as political competition.**



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

The Weak democratic traditions and culture, largely due to the protracted democratic process and absence of checks and balances:

- **The lack of effective checks and balances between the 3 branches of government.**
- **Domination of the Executive.**
- **Parliament may lack the required autonomy and financial independence from the Executive.**
- **Lack of credibility of the judicial system.**



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

The weak institutions created through political rather than normative processes impact negatively on national and local governance, as well as on participation and the delivery of services:

- The civil service has tended to be supply rather than demand driven, lacking of focus on outputs, outcomes and impact.
- growing urban poverty in many countries, coupled with rising demand for services in urban slums, represents a new challenge in service delivery.
- Too many tiers of decentralized government and too many districts, provinces, and regions were created.
- Finding ways to accommodate traditional systems into modern statehood.



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

The weak political parties, particularly with regard to party internal governance structures, finance, leadership recruitment and gender representation:

- **Political parties are playing an increasingly critical role in the consolidation of democracy**
- **Most of the political parties lack adequate internal democratic processes.**
- **Transformation to democratic politics and Traditions for political parties, both ruling and opposition.**



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

Difficulties in managing identity, ethnic and religious related conflicts: a leadership challenge:

- **The issue of the indivisibility of identity, ethnic and religious related conflicts.**
- **The leadership challenge in addressing this issue is the most serious one.**



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

The challenge of transforming the private sector to serve as an engine of growth and development:

- **Good governance of the business enterprise.**
- **The private sector generally lacks access to human and financial resources, knowledge, markets and labour, impacting negatively on its effectiveness in promoting growth and employment.**
- **Suffers from a lack of dependability and predictability in the management of state affairs.**
- **Serious gaps between policy intentions and pronouncements made by the government and actual implementation.**



The Major Challenges to Democratic Governance in the Region

The Gender Gap:

- Political playing field is uneven and not conducive to women's participation.
- Political, public, cultural and social environments are often unfriendly or even hostile to women.
- Enhanced women participation needs to be addressed, and there are instruments for that (e.g. Quota).



Conclusion

- It is clear that, democratic governance is a process that has no short cuts. There is a need for a long-term perspective on democracy.
- The democratic governance must be seen to have an instrumentalist value and relevance to improving human development.
- While the core tenets of democratic governance have universal validity, the democracy a nation chooses to develop depends on its history and circumstances.
- Countries will necessarily be “differently democratic.
- Democracy that empowers people must be built- it cannot be imported.



THE END

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