Power-sharing To Build Peace?
The Burundi Experience with Power-sharing Agreements

Ashild Falch, Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW)

During the 11-year civil war in Burundi, numerous attempts were made to bring together the contending parties for negotiations over power-sharing. Major agreements to share power between Hutu and Tutsi groups were signed in 1994, 2000 and 2004, but none of these agreements contributed fully to building the peace and good governance that were envisioned for them. Whereas all of the agreements were signed in the context of an ongoing civil war, none included all of the parties to the conflict, thus provoking the emergence of spoilers and prolongation of the armed conflict.

With the signing of a cessation of hostility agreement with the last remaining rebel group in May 2008, there is now some cause for optimism on the security side of the Burundi peace process. However, since 2007 the government has been going through an institutional crisis related to the most recent power-sharing agreement, and governance problems continue to jeopardize Burundi’s prospects for sustainable peace and democracy.

The Burundi Civil War: 1994-2005
A longstanding conflict over unequal distribution of wealth and monopolization of power between the dominant Tutsi minority and the marginalized Hutu majority has dominated most of Burundi’s history since the country’s independence from Belgium in 1962. Massacres in 1965, 1972, 1988, 1991 and 1993 led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Burundians, and a failed coup and the assassination of the democratically elected Hutu President Ndadaye in October 1993 precipitated a civil war in 1994. The war (1994–2005) was fought between the Tutsi-dominated government army and several Hutu-based opposition groups. Each of the two main rebel groups – the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD–FDD) and the Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu–Forces Nationales de Libération (Palipehutu–FNL) – had its own support base within the Hutu community, though they represented competing solutions to the conflict. While the CNDD–FDD fought to re-establish the democratic institutions
from 1993, the aims of the Palipehutu–FNL were to raise Hutu awareness about the massacre in 1972, obtain justice for the victims of the massacre and overthrow the Tutsi-dominated government. The Burundi civil war represents one of the most intractable conflicts in Africa. It is estimated to have caused the deaths of over 300,000 people, while displacing another 1.3 million.

Power-Sharing Agreements in Burundi
Three major agreements that included provisions for power-sharing were signed during Burundi’s civil war, but implemented with varying degrees of success: the 1994 Convention of Government, the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and the 2004 Burundi Power-Sharing Agreement.

1994 Convention of Government
The first formal attempt at introducing power-sharing to the political structure in Burundi was carried out in the context of an emerging civil war. A power-sharing agreement, the Convention of Government, was signed by 12 political parties in 1994. The Convention of Government introduced power-sharing between Hutu and Tutsi in both a coalition government and the public sector. However, the agreement failed to take into account the results from the democratic elections in 1993, and it neither included any of the rebel groups nor addressed any of the primary grievances that led to the civil war. Clashes between the Tutsi-dominated army and pro-Hutu rebel groups continued unabated, and the coalition government was overthrown by a military coup in 1996.

2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement
The second attempt at institutionalizing power-sharing was the culmination of a lengthy negotiation process carried out under heavy regional and international pressure in Arusha between 1998 and 2000. The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000 aimed to institutionalize a democratic system of power-sharing between Burundi’s Hutu and Tutsi political parties, and initiated a three-year transitional period with a grand coalition government. Although considered an important step towards bringing peace to Burundi, the Arusha Agreement did not include ceasefire agreements with any of the major rebel groups, and the civil war continued.
2004 Burundi Power-Sharing Agreement
The Burundi Power-Sharing Agreement was signed between the government and the main rebel group, the CNDD–FDD, in August 2004. The power-sharing agreement reflected the spirit of the Arusha Agreement and provided a framework that assured the country’s ethnic groups a proportional share of the political power following the scheduled democratic elections. Ethnic balance would also be ensured in the security forces. These stipulations were included in the constitution that came into effect a few months later, and were thus meant to direct future composition of the state institutions. The power-sharing arrangements were implemented through elections in 2005, which gave a resounding victory for the CNDD–FDD, whose leader Pierre Nkurunziza now serves as president and head of the coalition government.

Even though several positive developments have taken place since the installation of the democratic power-sharing institutions in 2005, the prospects for durable peace and democracy in Burundi remain uncertain. A 2006 ceasefire signed with the last remaining rebel group, the Palipehutu–FNL, is yet to be implemented. Following a dramatic increase in violent confrontations between the government army and the Palipehutu–FNL in April 2008, a cessation of hostility agreement was signed with the latter in May, and the rebel group started the process of assembling its combatants in July. Although this brings hope for the peace process, the consolidation of peace is dependent on a successful outcome of the still ongoing negotiations between the Palipehutu–FNL and the government. Furthermore, a continued lack of political dialogue, along with attempts by the ruling party to monopolize power have led to a precarious political situation, which makes it difficult to call the 2004 power-sharing agreement a success.

Lessons Learned About Power-Sharing from Burundi
The Burundi case offers four major lessons about power-sharing: First, an obvious reason explaining the limited success of the three Burundian power-sharing agreements is their exclusiveness. Although the last two power-sharing agreements were implemented mostly successfully at the elite level, several of the rebel groups were not included in the peace negotiations, and their fight against the government army continued unabated. Given that one of the greatest risks to peacebuilding in post-conflict situations comes from potential spoilers, inclusion of the Palipehutu–FNL into the political system and the security forces is vital if current peacebuilding efforts in Burundi are to succeed.

Further, the power-sharing agreements failed to move beyond ethnic categorizations. Concessions granting the Tutsi community an exceptional degree of over-representation and a minority veto have accommodated that ethnic group, but also encouraged the Palipehutu–FNL to continue its fight for a political system that mirrors the demographic representation of the different communities in a more proportional manner. The 2004 power-sharing agreement left the contradictions that fuelled the civil war intact, undermining efforts to articulate more inclusive democratic participatory politics. In order for Burundi to achieve last-

National Assembly:
Party Strength and Ethnic Profile (2005)

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Source: Filip Reyntjens 2005
ing peace and stability, a non-ethnicized vision of state power should eventually be attempted, one that is inclusive and opens for equal opportunities to participate in the state for all, not only based on the ethnicity of one. This would require setting a sunset date for the ethnic power-sharing stipulations in the constitution.

Third, constitutional stipulations meant to ensure power-sharing are not always enough to guarantee elite cooperation. Although the 2005 constitution includes several stipulations to ensure elite cooperation, loopholes in the system make it difficult for a weak and divided political opposition to control the executive. The prospects of the current grand coalition government rely increasingly on the political will and intent of the CNDD-FDD to initiate political dialogue and include the other political parties in the decisionmaking process.

A fourth and more general lesson from the desultory implementation of the many ceasefire and peace agreements in Burundi relates to the effect of the intense pressure and involvement by international and regional actors throughout the peace process. Few of the peace agreements in the Burundian peace process were signed by the parties of their own free will, and many of the decisions reached in the peace negotiations were made under considerable external prodding. Even though international pressure certainly has been instrumental in pushing the peace process forward, it has also to a considerable degree overshadowed the importance of finding home-grown solutions to the conflict.

About the Author:
Ashild Falch is a researcher with the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) at PRIO. She has a background in comparative politics, and her main research interests are: transitions from civil war to democracy, power-sharing, and determinants of the durability of post-civil war peace. She can be reached at afalch@prio.no.

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