Building a Political Settlement: The International Approach to Kenya's 2008 Post-Election Crisis

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Abstract:

This paper presents findings from an empirical study of the 2008 Kenyan crisis, aimed at exploring the role and effectiveness of the international development and diplomatic communities' response. This response involved working to ameliorate the fragile political environment that followed the disputed 2007 elections. Thus, this case study was selected as an archetype to demonstrate how international actors can work cooperatively on political settlements. The key objective of this research is to analyse and share lessons about how those international actors present in Kenya engaged with the evolving political settlement to address the conflict. This study draws upon evolving political economy and political settlement debates in its analysis and uses the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Fragile States Principles as a framework. Adopting such an analytical lens encourages examination of the multiple, context-specific underlying dynamics that influenced the role of international actors during this period of political transition. It also enables a study of the operational factors facing external actors when they attempt to work more politically, and recognition of how carefully these actors need to use the limited role they have in shaping the internal institutional arrangements and dynamics of the countries within which they work. The study's main findings indicate that in the 2008 post-election period the international development and diplomatic communities collectively commanded substantive influence over the nature and trajectory of Kenya's evolving political settlement. It argues that these actors enhanced their influence over many important political issues principally as a result of applying good practice in fragile situations: understanding the context, adopting a unified and legitimate stance, coordinating and collaborating closely and acting fast to prevent conflict. They also laid the foundations for statebuilding in order to address the causes of the conflict. Prior to the crisis, a cohesive political voice was missing and many international actors lacked a thorough understanding of Kenya's underlying political dynamics. This study concludes that the international development and diplomatic communities—by coming together and following good practice—significantly increased their influence over the political settlement following the 2008 crisis in Kenya.