

Citizen-Politician Linkages in the Formal and Informal Sector in Kenya

LEVY ODERA

I landed in Kenya to undertake pre-dissertation research in May 2008, just two months after the end of the post-election crisis that was marked by the signing of a power sharing agreement between the two main political parties in Kenya, namely: Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and Party of National Unity (PNU). In spite of the politically unstable situation I was able to conduct my research from May to August.

Initially, the objective that I set out for the pre-dissertation research was to find out how the nexus between power relations and informal institutions affect business performance in the informal sector by 1) conducting three focus group discussions in three different cities; 2) conducting 60 in-depth interviews, and 3) carrying out an exploratory survey based on the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Before starting my research I recruited three research assistants who I trained for one week. The training sessions also included fieldwork, where we did mapping in the nine markets where I conducted the research. After training was over, we started by conducting the focus group discussions. Following the focus group discussions, and based on the information we gathered from them, we then conducted 20 semi-structured interviews in each of

the three cities. All these interviews were tape recorded and notes taken. Upon completing the interviews we spent two weeks transcribing. I then went through each transcribed interview looking for common themes. The analysis of the interviews revealed that a more urgent problem in the informal sector seemed to be the very weak linkages between citizens and politicians. To confirm that the citizen-politician linkages are indeed very weak in the informal sector, I then conducted 360 surveys in the three cities.

In the final stage I decided to descriptively analyze some of the key variables from the data. The preliminary findings from the surveys confirmed that the linkages between citizens and politicians in this sector are very weak. With respect to these findings, I used the last week in the field to conduct three key informant interviews on



the nature of citizen-politician linkages in the formal sector. The three key informants whom I interviewed were a politician and scholar who contested for a parliamentary seat but lost, a personal assistant for the Deputy Prime Minister of Kenya, and a journalist who is a communications officer for the ODM party. From these interviews I tentatively learned that the citizen-politician linkages in the formal sector are stronger than those in the informal sector, but this is yet to be confirmed through future research. These findings have subsequently led to a refinement of the issue that I intend to study for my dissertation. I now intend to focus on whether citizen-politician linkages are stronger in the formal sector, whether formal institutions play any role in establishing the linkages, and whether these linkages contribute to state building in Kenya.

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