

Chapter 6

The Poll and the Count

Opening of the Poll

Polling stations in the first multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections in the United Republic of Tanzania for 34 years, were to open at 7am on 29 October 1995 and close nine hours later at 4pm. The count was to be conducted at the polling stations immediately after the close of poll. In all the regions where we were deployed, our teams arrived at polling stations well before 7am so as to observe the scheduled opening.

Our experience was varied across the country. In some cases, polling stations opened on time and processed voters fairly efficiently through the day. In other cases, extreme delays of up to several hours were experienced for a number of different reasons, including election materials and sufficient quantities of ballot papers not being received, polling stations not being properly set up, or, because some Presiding Officers and their Assistants were protesting about not receiving their allowances. In still other cases, some polling stations observed by our teams in Dar es Salaam, Mbeya and Dodoma did not open at all on polling day.

The atmosphere at the stations was generally peaceful. In most places, voters had already been queuing for some time before the 7am start. Voters were orderly, and showed extraordinary patience, even though in many cases they had a long wait before they could vote. Special consideration was given to the elderly, the disabled, and mothers with babies.

Generally, in the areas where we observed the opening of the poll, election officials followed the prescribed procedures. We also found that election officials and the party representatives present co-operated with each other, which helped to improve the pace of the process in most stations. Where needed, voters received assistance in voting from a Presiding Officer or someone else according to procedure agreed with the polling agents present.

Late Delivery and Shortage of Materials

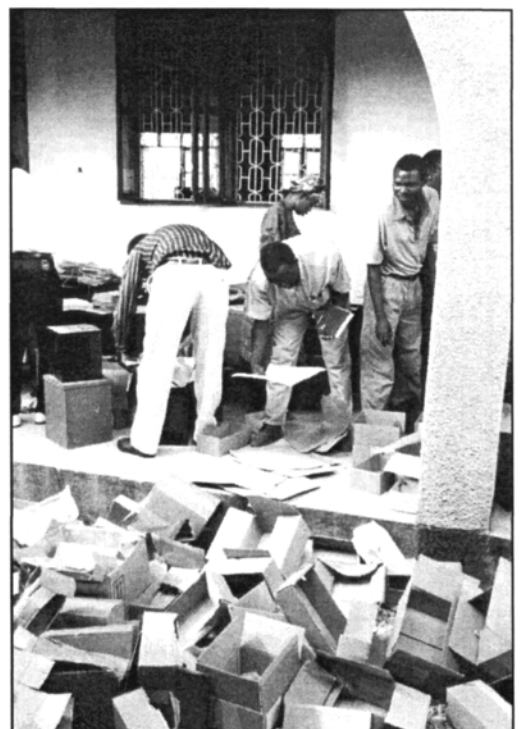
The reasons for the late or insufficient delivery of essential electoral supplies to certain polling stations were not explained, frustrating election officials and voters alike. However we observed very few stations where voters became angry and hostile as a result of the delay. We noted that in some polling stations, voting nevertheless proceeded with what was available, and in others, the election officials insisted on waiting until they had all the necessary materials before opening the polls.

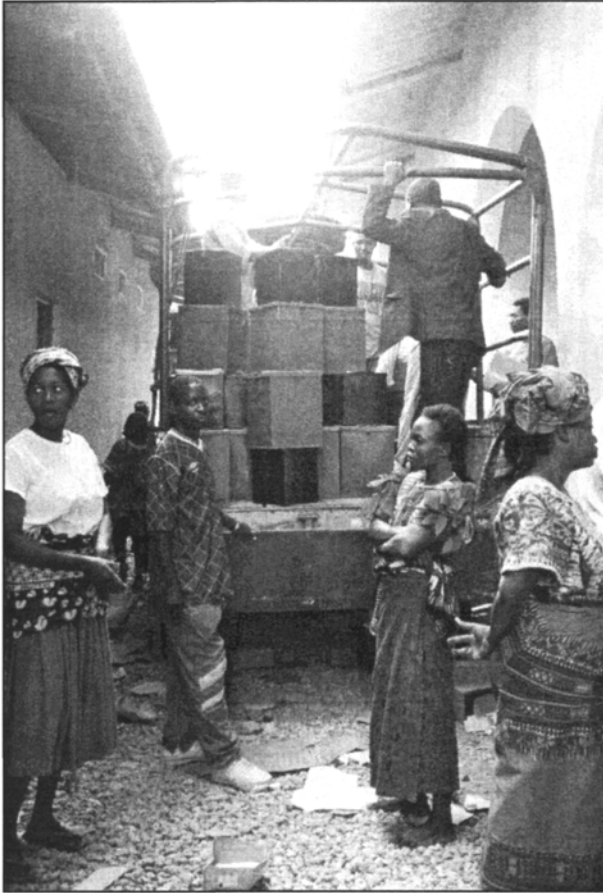
When our teams visited distribution centres in Dar es Salaam to



Conscientious election officials in Dar es Salaam carefully seal ballot boxes in front of witnesses before polling begins

11am on polling day and election officials are still scrambling to find their materials so they can open their stations in one of Dar es Salaam's constituencies





1pm on polling day and some of the boxes were just being sent to stations in Dar es Salaam which had still to open



4pm on polling day, when voting should have stopped ... these officials were still looking for balloting materials and their stations never opened

investigate the delays that had prevented many polling stations from opening at all, we witnessed chaotic scenes where desperate election officials were grabbing election materials which had failed to reach their polling stations. The scale of the delays in Dar es Salaam were so acute that the next day the NEC annulled voting in the city's seven constituencies, and said that a new polling date would be set.

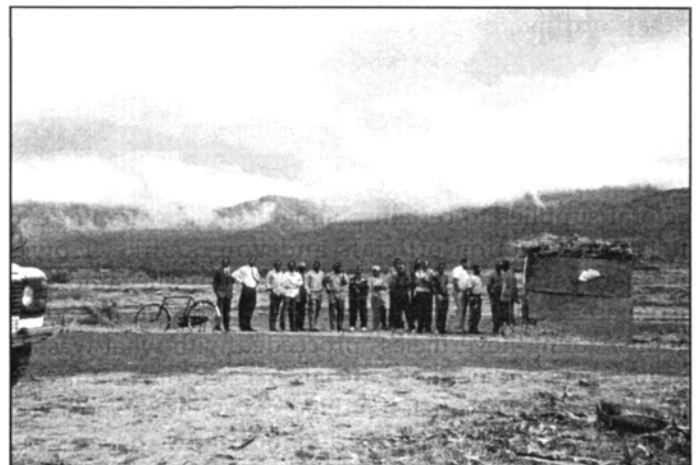
We believe that the cumulative effect of the shortage of materials across the country could be significant. Large numbers of people left stations before they had cast their ballot or, even if they waited, were unable to vote because there were no ballot papers available. Such

was our concern at the time, that many of our teams reported the shortage of materials to the local electoral authorities.

Twice on polling day in Dar es Salaam, our Chairperson reported to the NEC the shortages he had witnessed in some polling stations, as well as the state of chaos at the offices of some Returning Officers, and the uneven response by Presiding Officers to the NEC's decision to extend polling until 8pm. We were unable to determine whether or not action was taken on the reports that we made. We do know that at those stations in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere where there were protracted delays or where no voting took place, election officials were very worried that angry voters could turn violent.

The Polling Stations

Sites easily accessible to the voters and unconnected with political parties had been selected as polling stations. These included schools, market places, butchers' shops, open halls and makeshift huts constructed for the elections. At many sites, there were more than one station and in some cases voting took place in the open air. Many of



An orderly queue at a booth in the foothills of Kilimanjaro



Above: In this polling station in Dar es Salaam, there was no 'booth' for privacy. Voters had to turn their backs on the room and make their mark

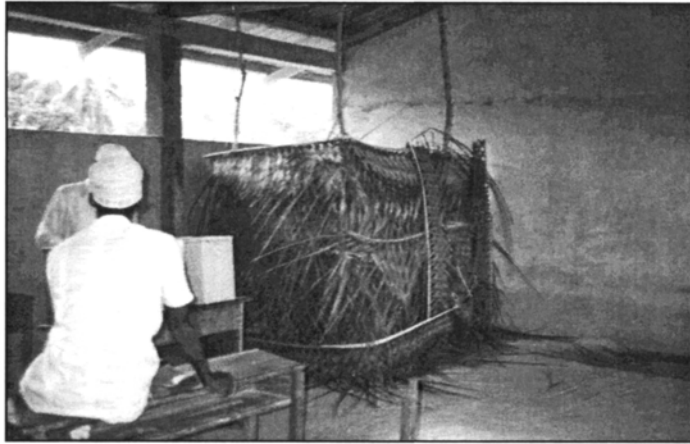
Below: This butcher's shop became a polling station in Dar es Salaam. Its officials spent almost 24 hours in it during voting, the count and later when they were ordered to guard the boxes



travel long distances in order to cast their ballot, and the count at each polling station would be speedier. However, transport problems meant that there were difficulties in getting election materials to so many small units. In some cases, unequal apportioning of electors between adjacent polling stations caused unnecessary queues of voters.

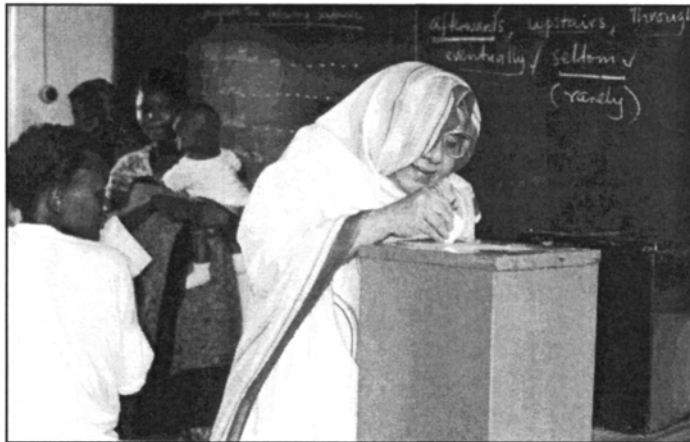
Security of Polling Stations

The security arrangements at the stations were generally good. The presence of security staff was discreet although we noted that in some places there was no security presence and in Dar es Salaam there were a few instances where security was intrusive. In some cases, the security staff helped to direct people to the right queues and assisted as requested by the election



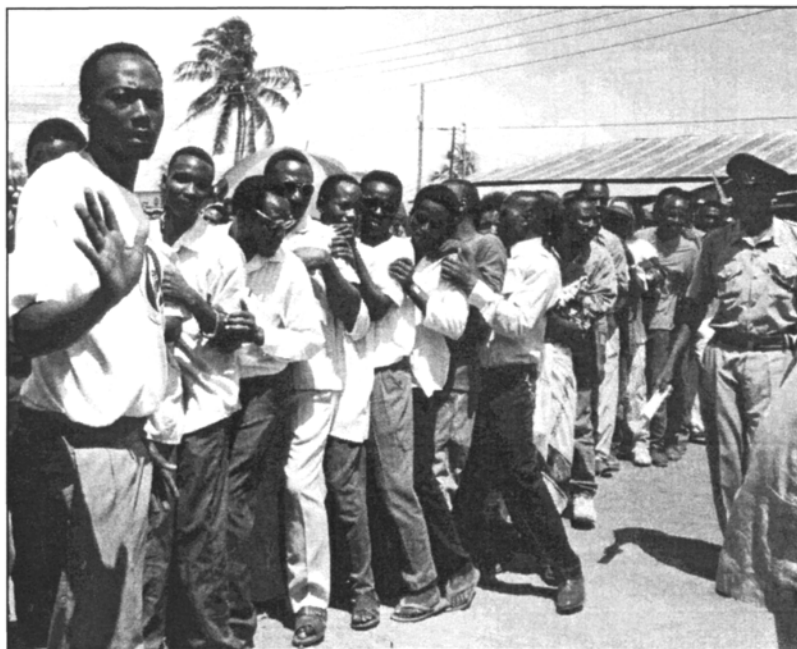
Above: This polling booth inside a school in Pemba was carefully woven from palm leaves

Below: Many women turned out to vote, despite having to wait long hours, often carrying babies with them



these stations were small and crammed with various election materials, election officials and party agents. Where there was no furniture, election officials sat on the floor or remained standing. Many stations were dark or poorly lit. This would have had an impact on the ability to process those voters who had arrived towards the end of the designated polling time and were required by law to be allowed to cast their vote, as well as on the mechanics of the count thereafter.

There were approximately 40,000 stations across the country and generally no more than 300 electors were assigned to one polling station. This arrangement offered two main advantages: voters would not have to



At this polling station in Dar es Salaam, hundreds of angry voters began pushing and shoving as voting got off slowly

officials. There were some places where concern was expressed over the replacement of police security by 'village militia'.

Secrecy of the Vote

The areas where people marked their ballots varied considerably. In some places, a separate room was available, or an area was screened off using school furniture, branches, bags, sacking and even colourful *kangas*. In others, voters had to mark their ballots at a desk or chair in a corner in full view of, and sometimes very close to, election officials and party agents in the same room.

We did not detect any instance where voters were interfered with in the booths or where others tried to see who they were voting for. However, while we recognise local constraints, we consider that greater effort could have been made to construct a private area, using

available materials in order to provide the necessary privacy and to foster the confidence that the secrecy of the vote was assured.

We noted too that the names and registration numbers of voters were announced by the election officials and often recorded by party agents. These party agents were also able to keep a record of the numbers on the ballot papers being given to voters. As individual ballot papers were held up for public scrutiny during the count, it could have been possible for an agent to check to see how any one person voted.

Concern had been raised from various quarters before polling day about the requirement that election officials record voters' registration numbers on the counterfoils of ballot papers, because this could be used to trace how a person voted. The NEC issued guidelines to Presiding Officers detailing that these counterfoils were to be secured at the close of poll and, before the count, placed in an envelope sealed by the Presiding Officer concerned and any of the polling agents present wishing to verify the seal. These counterfoils could only be opened by court order. The practice among Presiding Officers varied with regard to recording of voters' registration numbers on the ballot paper counterfoils, but in all the cases we observed the procedure for the sealing of counterfoils before beginning the count was followed.

Electoral Staff and Polling Agents

In general, the electoral staff followed the prescribed procedures, although in their efforts to be accurate they were sometimes very slow. Most of them had received training in their polling day duties, although this may not have been adequate given the evidence of inefficiency and some confusion over procedures.

It must be said that the staff had to work in extremely uncomfortable physical conditions for long hours, in many cases not having received their promised allowances. Even though they were not satisfied with the arrangements made for them to carry out their duties, many nevertheless proceeded to make the best use of the resources available. Some displayed creativity in the way they made use of available facilities and were courteous and helpful to voters.

Polling agents were present at all the stations we visited. In general, they were conscientious, alert, showed keen interest in the proceedings and co-operated with the electoral staff.

Close of Poll

As more and more information about polling stations opening late and sufficient election materials not being delivered filtered in, the NEC took the decision during the afternoon of polling day, to extend polling until 8pm at all stations. The announcement was made on the radio, but many polling stations obviously did not get the message, or only learnt of it after dutifully closing the poll and sealing the ballot boxes at the scheduled closing time of 4pm.

This led to even more confusion, with stations within the same constituency continuing to accept voters, others closing and starting the count, and still others who had already closed breaking the seals on the ballot boxes and resuming voting. There were some instances where we observed people who turned up to vote after 4pm were recalled after having been turned away.

We felt that the four-hour extension of polling was unnecessary in most areas as almost all voters had already cast their ballot before 4pm, and forcing the stations to stay open delayed the count and caused considerable problems with regard to the proper administration of the poll and the count in conditions of inadequate accommodation and lighting. In some areas where late delivery of election materials delayed the ability of voters to cast their ballot, the extension of the poll made the difference. In other areas, where the problem was a shortage of ballot papers, it made no difference at all.

Later in the evening, as the confusion continued, the NEC made a second announcement, also conveyed via radio, requesting all election staff to stay at their stations and ensure the security of the ballot boxes. In some stations, counting had started and this continued as long as light – from whatever source – was available. In others, staff sealed the boxes and waited. We witnessed many instances where dedicated staff and polling agents slept at their stations, sometimes in the most uncomfortable conditions and often without food.

It was only the next day, 30 October 1995, that the NEC, after receiving reports from all over the country and after long discussions with the Returning Officers of Dar es Salaam's seven constituencies, annulled the voting in Dar es Salaam and announced that a fresh polling date for the city's voters would be set. The NEC also stated that polling would continue the same day (30 October 1995) in eight constituencies elsewhere in the country which had not been given an opportunity to vote. Meanwhile in many other constituencies, the count had already begun.

The Count

In general, the process of counting started late and was slow because election officials were extremely careful about following procedures. At the close of poll and before counting could take place, polling agents were required to complete complaints forms. Election officials were then required to sort election materials and place the counterfoils into separate envelopes which were then sealed. This reconciling of election materials took a relatively long time, was hampered further by poor lighting and often being carried out in cramped physical conditions.

In Zanzibar, the counting process could not begin until it was authorised by an Assistant Returning Officer who had to supervise and complete one count before moving on to another. This inevitably delayed the process, and in at least one case, a Returning Officer insisted that any candidate present had to witness each polling station count, which further compounded the delays. There were *ad hoc* modifications to permit simultaneous counts, but it remained an exhausting exercise for tired officials.

In their efforts to ensure transparency and accuracy, Presiding Officers displayed ballot papers one by one to party agents, and counted and recounted the ballots. Spoilt ballots were the subject of intense discussion to ensure that all party agents agreed with the decision eventually taken. Results at each station were announced and we observed that some of these had been posted outside the polling stations before we left our areas of deployment. In Dar es Salaam and in other areas we visited, however, there were reports that some officials refused to count until they had received their allowances.

We were unable to follow the process through to the completion of the tally since our teams were required to return to Dar es Salaam the day after polling. In many cases, because of delays mentioned previously, polling and counting were still taking place when we departed from our



Commonwealth Observer Group chairperson Rashleigh Jackson (right) asks election officials about the chaos in Dar es Salaam on polling day

respective areas of deployment. This situation was unfortunate as we considered it important to observe the counting and tallying procedures to ensure that the elections had completed satisfactorily.

We firmly believe that the problems that occurred on polling day in several constituencies indicated inadequacies on the part of the NEC in organising and managing the elections.

Postscript

Consequent upon the decision of the NEC to annul the voting in Dar es Salaam and following reports from our Observers deployed to Dodoma and Mbeya that many polling stations did not open at all on polling day, we requested a meeting with the NEC in Dar es Salaam. This took place on 1 November 1995. Our main objective was to ascertain from the Chairman of the NEC whether the Commission had any plans to ensure that the voters in these areas would be able to exercise their right to vote.

The Chairman of the NEC and the Director of Elections responded that there were eight constituencies excluding those in Dar es Salaam, where voting had not proceeded satisfactorily. Where specific problems had been reported by Returning Officers, permission had been granted for polling to be continued on 30 and 31 October 1995.

Our Chairperson enquired specifically about the shortages of ballot papers for the presidential ballot which we had observed in a number of areas. The NEC informed the Group that this had been rectified by despatching extra ballot papers from Dar es Salaam.

Before departure, our Chairperson issued a statement summarising the Group's observations. This is at *Annex X*.