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Preface

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Preface

Gerti Hesseling

Since the early nineties the presence of international election observers has become a familiar sight at elections in Africa. Many Western donor-countries are of the opinion that elections in Africa are an essential contribution to the establishment of a democratic political order and therefore deserve support. The Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation noted in a recent memo to Parliament that the purpose of election observation was threefold: to express solidarity with emerging democracies, to strengthen public confidence in the electoral process, and to contribute to the free and fair conduct of elections. Between 1992 and 1996 the Netherlands has sent election observers to ten African countries, and in early 1997 requests for other missions from at least an equal number of countries were under consideration to be carried out in that same year.

In view of the growing demand for observer or monitoring missions and the relatively limited expertise in this field, it is not surprising that there is an increasing need felt on the part of policy-makers and international organizations to develop new approaches and guidelines as well as exchange views with scholars and researchers on the issues involved in election monitoring in non-Western settings, with less economic means and less secure institutional structures. The founding of the Stockholm-based IDEA (Institute for the Development of Electoral Assistance) as well as the UN Electoral Assistance Unit are witness to this trend.

This book emanates from a day-long seminar held at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 1997, organized to exchange views between academic researchers, observers, and policy-makers on elections and democratization in Africa in general. Apart from the general aim of stimulating synergy between the various parties involved, the idea was to promote insights into the recurrent problems and eventual solutions to matters of election monitoring in Africa. On the basis of this

meeting, researchers were invited to write a chapter reflecting on their own research findings, and/or place their experiences as election observers, either officially or unofficially, in a wider perspective.

Next to offering new academic perspectives on the highly topical issue of democratization and election observation in Africa, the aim of this book is to stimulate dialogue between research, policy and practice on this subject. In recent years, the idea has gained ground that academic research can be a strategic instrument for development cooperation, not only in its preparatory stages but also in its implementation and evaluation. The Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation, for instance, has asked the African Studies Centre (Leiden) to carry out an extensive critical study of the literature on democratization in Africa (see R. Buijtenhuijs and E. Rijnierse, *Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa 1989-1992*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1993; and R. Buijtenhuijs and C. Thiriot, *Démocratisation en Afrique au Sud du Sahara 1992-1995*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1995). These studies, led by Dr R. Buijtenhuijs, have shown, among other things, that election studies in Africa are on the increase, but that most of the work consists of case studies, dealing with election procedures, electoral fraud, corruption, and problems of neo-patrimonialism.

Recent surveys of election studies in Africa have been offered in special issues of the journals *African Journal of Political Science* 2(1) 1997, *Afrika Spectrum* 31(1) 1996, and very recently *Politique Africaine* 69 (1998). However, as R. Otayek noted in his introduction to the latter journal, the field of 'election sociology' is not yet well-developed. When studying the many scientific publications of the last decade on democratization in general and elections in particular, it is striking that few specifically address the phenomenon of election observation or monitoring. Most works, apart from manuals, deal again with case studies. (Interestingly, much of the literature is coming from German scholars: see for instance U. Engel *et al.*, *Deutsche Wahlbeobachtung in Afrika*, Hamburg: Institut für Afrikakunde, 1996; and the journal *Afrika Spectrum*, which has a regular series of articles on monitoring missions in Africa.)

The case studies in this book, presented in Part II, are placed within an historical-political context of elections in Africa (Part I). The Introduction is aimed at discussing some

more theoretical issues in the study of elections and their observation in Africa, while Part III contains a retrospective analysis of the recent policy of the Netherlands, followed by an evaluation of a new model of donor-country observation tried out in the Kenyan general elections of December 1997.

The breadth and detail of the studies in this book may contribute to a more informed reflection on the phenomenon of election observation, and to a further elucidation of its historical, cultural and political contexts. In addition, the study of elections and their observation is relevant for the development and evaluation of policies in this field. We realize that the use of research findings in policy and political practice is often a diffuse and unpredictable process, but are confident that this book can stimulate dialogue between researchers, observers and policy-makers. We finally express the sincere hope that new insights will be translated into policies which will benefit the citizens of the African countries struggling to establish and sustain democracy.

As a final note, the editors would like to express their thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, especially to Ms Kanta Adhin and Mr Jan Gijs Schouten, for their assistance in the organization of the 1997 Seminar and for supporting the idea of this book.