

## COALITIONS BOOK LAUNCH

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### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

#### MARRIAGES OF INCONVENIENCE – THE POLITICS OF COALITIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Thank you, Prof Mzukisi Qobo and other colleagues at the Wits School of Governance for partnering us in this event, as well as other friends who have joined us for this launch.

Today, the Mapungubwe Institute publishes its twenty-fifth book arising from comprehensive research. The most recent ones, for those who may not be aware, are on African perspectives on the 4IR, on arts and national development and on contested meanings of land in relation to identity and nation formation.

I suppose that the motivation for this tome on coalition governance is self-evident. As we all know, coalitions are, in a sense, a reflection of people's will – an instruction from an electorate that does not have overwhelming confidence in any single party on the ballot paper.

Through *Marriages of Inconvenience: The politics of coalitions in South Africa* we seek to collate and interpret lessons in managing such eventualities. The book draws from domestic experiences as well as from case studies on the rest of the African continent, and generic instances further afield.

Though the recent experience has been quite intense, coalitions in various iterations have been a part of South African politics since 1994. Nationally, we had a 'grand coalition' in the form of a Government of National Unity and there were such marriages in some of the country's provinces.

At local government level, coalitions have been relatively commonplace, with many situations where no single party attained an absolute majority. This gained prominence after 2016 when many metros, and some large towns, became sites of coalition governments. These have taken a variety of forms, including co-governance arrangements and confidence-and-supply agreements, where minority governments are propped up by other parties on an issue-by-issue basis.

This book distils the factors that ensure success, along with those that have led to disaster. And it would seem that South Africa is poorly equipped for coalition politics. Of course, instability in coalitions is not unique to our country; but at the same time, it is not an inevitable product of multiparty governance. In many countries, and indeed in some municipalities in South Africa, coalition partners have governed cooperatively, constructively and in the popular interest; and the culture of coalition politics has become ingrained.

What are some of the relevant issues in all these experiences? Electoral and party systems, political culture and the quality of political leadership have something to do with this.

When political parties co-operate and deliver effective governance, through mature consensus-building, coalitions have a stabilising effect. But where you have debilitating competition during various phases of the electoral cycle, the coalitions fall apart and get continually reconstituted. As a result, service to the public is severely compromised.

Various chapters of this volume identify critical questions on how to stabilise coalition governance in the South African setting. The first relates to whether there should be post-election workable agreements that are lodged with, and assessed by, some competent authority. The second is whether, at local level, the option of a proportional executive system should become mandatory when a single party, or coalition of parties, is unable to attain a stable majority. Thirdly, strict observance of the laws on the appointment of bureaucrats, and on procurement and other administrative functions, is even more crucial under coalition government.

But constitutional and legislative regulation has its limits. You need political maturity, sincerity and goodwill among party leaders. And so, it may take time and more practical experience for South African politics to mature in this regard.

We do hope, as MISTRA, that this book will help promote rigorous debate and prudent coalition practice in South Africa, inspired – above all – by the commitment to serve the people’s economic and social interests.

Thank you to the authors and the teams across the publication chain, as well as those who continue to support MISTRA even under current difficult circumstances.

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