

“ONE KENYA, ONE DREAM. THE KENYA WE WANT”

**AN INPUT TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY THE
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, GOVERNMENT OF KENYA.**

**KENYATTA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE (KICC), 4-6TH
FEBRUARY 2009.**

PREPARED BY: KENYA DEBT RELIEF NETWORK (KENDREN).

“The things that will destroy us are: politics without principle; pleasure without conscience; wealth without work; knowledge without character; business without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction,

The “Kenya We Want” conference organized by the Office of the Prime Minister of the Government of Kenya comes at a most opportune moment. Just about an year after the nation witnessed its worst post election conflagration, this presents an opportune moment to delve deeper into perspective and converse as a nation on whether actually our collective refrain, “never again” holds true and how do we move forward in seeking national cohesion, reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and a sustainable economic development for both the prosperity and posterity of our nation.

This paper is a humble contribution on the debate, as our nation persuades to rise from the ashes. It draws broadly from a civil society outlook and is constructed on the main persuasions of the sector. It does not pretend to offer all the solutions but is essentially a tool of deepening the debate around the need for a new national consciousness.

Abstract.¹

The events in Kenya after the much criticized and controversial elections of 27th December 2007 have exposed the planned failures of our nascent democracy and both the ideological rot and inadequacy across the Kenyan body politic. While this has left many wondering what actually went wrong, I posit that an ideologically bankrupt political process that revolves around access to power, its consolidation and use to accumulate wealth is a recipe for failure. A bastard political economy founded on self preservation ushers in not only a ‘bandit’ economy but a flawed political process that at one hand is divorced from the aspirations of the citizenry (based on a ‘social contract’ typology) and appended to the global capital class typically for its service and act as a transmission line

¹ This paper has benefited from a broad array of views and inputs from colleagues working in the Governance sector across the socio-economic and political realm. Kiama Kaara, Programmes Manager at the Kenya Debt Relief Network (KENDREN) has acted as lead and provided incisive inputs and direction in making this work a reality.

for resource extraction and capital flows best espoused by Walter Rodney in "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa."

With a relative calm and stability since independence and ground gained as the economic powerhouse and beacon of peace on this eastern sea board of Africa, Kenya's unraveling confounded many.

Resultantly, as a haven of peace in the midst of warring neighbors'; across all its borders, Kenya has attained and played a significant strategic role within the global political, financial and economic architecture. It is arguably the most dependable and consistent gateway to global interests on these shores.

But with the aftermath of the December 2007 elections, it has shown that calm doesn't necessarily mean peace. And that suspicion, mistrust, competing, contested and contentious interests especially on the question of access to resources and ability to secure livelihoods is a glaring innate conflict that threatens to tear the social fabric of the Kenyan nation apart.

Commentators and observers alike are differentiated in their approach to the analysis of the underlying issues and the emergent aftermath (albeit all too often based on their persuasions along the warring sides). But across the board, all are united in the fact that this was not just a one off affair and the effects while tangible in the number of deaths, internally displaced persons (IDPs), razed houses, forced displacements and forced occupations, collapsed businesses and infrastructure, lawlessness, rapes, animosity, mutual suspicions and the general rapture of the social fabric will have a wide ranging effect, with monumental influence on the character, pace and nature of the emergent Kenyan body politic.

Kenya's Unfinished Agenda: The Crisis of Social Development.

In analyzing the challenges facing this country during the current political dispensation I will highlight ten items namely:

- The need for a national vision to guide the country's economic and social development.
- The need for a lean and efficient government bureaucracy.
- The need to devolve power and decision making over the governance of economic resources through a new constitutional order.
- The need to invest in industrial development and research;

- The need to forge stronger economic, trade, technology and commercial links with the developed countries and the emergent economic powerhouses of the East and Asia.
- The need to deepen our understanding of Kenya's economy through research.
- The need to develop sports and culture into a major export industry.

Whereas these ideas are not new and have continuously been articulated in various forms and generic versions in numerous blueprints' including the current Vision 2030, I contend that they need to be looked at afresh. Of essence they will need to be made SMART (Specific, Manageable, Accurate, Reliable, and Time Bound)

For example, while the Vision 2030 blue print makes a good attempt at tackling issues to do with economic management, but like other past development blueprints; it fails to give any ideological direction to the nation's social development agenda.

Concerning ourselves with issues such as our level and quality of social development, may sound trivial to a nation such as Kenya that is grappling with the challenges of mass poverty and economic underdevelopment it should however be noted that this seemingly inane factor may be among the critical missing links to Kenya's transformation into a socially and politically progressive 21st century nation.

The crisis of social development is as significant as the challenge of poverty and economic underdevelopment in Kenya's development process. The holistic social development of a nation is a more complex and challenging phenomenon. Holistic advancement of a society entails more than the mere development of physical infrastructure, access to capital goods, markets and technology.

While it is universally acknowledged that ease of access by all to essential livelihood needs (food, shelter, water, healthcare, education) is a significant indicator of a society's social well being, the presence of this attribute does not on its own complete the equation of a society that is socially developed in the holistic sense.

Science and technology may be applied to enhance the ability of a society to access wealth and knowledge, but on their own, these two elements can not guarantee holistic advancement of a human society. This then begs the question, can a nation be wealthy, scientifically and technologically advanced and yet be socially underdeveloped? The answer is yes.

Numerous examples exist where highly technologically advanced nations with immense wealth suffer from acute crises of social under development----America being a good example. A natural calamity in the form of a hurricane named *Katrina*, exposed to the entire world the sorry state of America's level of social development.

Social development implies the presence of holistic humanizing and civilizing principles in the political culture and ideological make up of a society. These factors are critical in influencing the behaviour and conduct of the entire society.

Most notable in a socially developed (civilized) society is the degree of respect (*heshima*) its members accord one another; the concern and care of another's human wellbeing and human dignity (*utu*); the quest for equity and equality (*usawa*) in the society; the concern for fairness and social justice (*haki*) and the degree of freedoms enjoyed by all (*uhuru*) and last but not least the ease by which all in a society are able to access to essential resources for their livelihood (*uhai*). .

The philosophy of *Utu* is an all encompassing afro-centric philosophy that places uttermost value on the human dignity of both man and woman. In other words, *“Utu is the spirit that ensures social justice, fairness, respect for each other, the environment and caring for the weak and vulnerable; the aged, the physically and mentally challenged. It is the spirit that ensures that every life is equally valued and held sacrosanct”*. The level of a society’s social advancement in this context is based on the level of its *utu*.

The philosophical ingredients of (*utu, uhuru, haki, na usawa*) form the software and glue that bond and defines a socially developed society. This construct must be distinguished from raw developmentalism, founded on the capitalistic notions of material accumulation that has for decades been touted by the West.

A socially developed society should exhibit a high degree of homogeneity in terms of its members sharing the attributes mentioned above. While most citizens of the USA may be able to access capital material goods, the high degree of inequity between black people and whites in accessing essential livelihood needs and economic opportunities does not qualify this great nation to enjoy the status of a socially developed nation. That is what hurricane Katrina remarkably revealed to the world.

Given this context, what then, is the level of Kenya’s social advancement? What social challenges face this nation as it strives to join other economically and industrially developed nations?

Kenya must avoid the mistakes of major Latin American economies such as Brazil, which rushed to adopt vertical, capitalistic growth models, that promotes wanton wealth accumulation by the minority elite, to the detriment of the rest of

society. This model has made Brazil one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Kenya is currently faced with the crisis of social development that has resulted in nearly 60% of the nation living in a state of social and economic deprivation. Effects of this phenomenon are being reflected in corrupt and unaccountable leadership, rural hopelessness, youth unemployment, mushrooming urban slums, crime and social delinquency among the youth, ethnic hatred and conflicts among other ills.

The rise of extremist gangs, of socially disenfranchised youths such as the "*Mungiki*" in parts of Central Kenya and similar ones in other parts of the nation, is a reflection of the depth of Kenya's social underdevelopment crisis.

The more we continue to hang on to the rigid centralized models of development, that promote the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few at the centre, the more the country will continue to sink deeper into the abyss of social destitution. The more the society will continue to give birth to endless generations of virulent "*Mungiki*", "*Chinkoros*" and "*Musumbiji*" gangs.

It is a foregone conclusion that Kenya's problem is embodied in her constitutional and governance framework. It is this more than any other factor that is behind the social and political crisis facing the country today.

To achieve *usawa* among her citizens, Kenya has no choice but to devolve and decentralize power over the governance and management of her economic resources. It is impossible to compensate the Pokots and Turkana for years of economic injustices without instituting a political framework that will give them an appreciable degree of control over their economic destiny.

It does not make sense under the laws of natural justice for the people of Karai in Kiambu to wallow under dehumanizing poverty, while a few kilometers away is a huge metropolis (Nairobi) that eats up and controls 60% of the nation's productivity.

Let the "*mwananchi*" of Karai have a say in how national resources are used to solve his/her social developmental challenges. The centralized system of governance in place today, reduces the ordinary Kenyan citizen into a non human object of pity and powerlessness. This explains why 1,000 of the nation's citizens can summarily be allowed to perish for the sake of safeguarding the interests of a despotic regime and governance order.

Mwalimu Nyerere in my neighbouring Tanzania, lost out on the vertical capitalistic growth formula, BUT imbued the Tanzania society with a humanizing philosophy of Ujamaa. In Ujamaa are to be found the elements and principles of *Utu na usawa*. The challenge left for the post Mwalimu regimes is to ensure the embodiment of this unifying philosophy into, current and future economic development models so as to engender a growth pattern model that is wholesome

On the other hand for Kenya to escape the shame of being permanently condemned into the den of a "man eat man society", the nation must adopt and champion new social and political order that will entrench the elements of *Utu, uhuru, haki, na usawa* into our way of life.

Perils of an "Elite Transition."

"We are a nation of ten billionaires and twenty million beggars..."

Statement attributed to J.M.Kariuki. A populist politician murdered in the 1970's ...and whose murders have never been arrested or brought to justice.

Do you know?

A one percent increase in Africa's share of trade would deliver seven times more than Africa receives in Aid?

In 2005, the UK imported 20,700 tonnes of cut flowers from the North and Sub-Saharan Africa! This had a declared value of around US\$ 110 million. Of these, the majority came fro Kenya (18,650 tonnes) with a value of 104 million!

"Msafiri", Kenya Airways In-flight Magazine, November-December, 2007.

The above quotations give a glimpse of the construct of the Kenyan political economy. J.M. Kariuki, while a vocal 'populist' voice for the poor, squatters and the landless was very wealthy in his own right. But his outspokenness lifted the veil of the inherent political, economic mindset of the ruling elite in post-independent Kenya.

The second quotation speaks for itself. Forty five years after independence, the pride of our economy, carried through our aptly named airline, "*Pride of Africa*" is that we are a raw material producing, export oriented economy. Our share of global wealth is on the basis of how best we feed the pursuits and desires (romantic or otherwise), of our western counterparts. Any person with a slight idea on horticulture farming (our second most important exchange earner after tourism) will attest, it's a sweat shop business littered with blood of the faceless poor, especially young women who never get to Valentine day candlelight dinners! But again, we must not be left out on the globalization train. These are the social costs of our march to economic development, we are told.

I argue that Kenya's problems today are a result of the planned failures of its development paradigm. With a well entrenched bureaucratic state; a relic of colonialism, the dominant neo-colonial patrimonial state founded on patronage has only served to deepen a perverse brand of a "winner takes all" rabid brand of capitalism.

As the guiding ideology, this has undermined both nation formation and integration and only served to perpetuate the state as the site of competition for an anarchic "primitive" mode of accumulation.

In this collage, a distinct 'elite' of those who control both the instruments of the state and the economic machinery has gelled to continue the perpetuation of a

control and domination typology best manifested in the rise of an imperial presidency.

I posit that it's the dysfunctional nature of this Political and Economic "elite" in its blind pursuit to concentrate power amongst and between itself that has plunged Kenya in the current abyss.

In quest of an "Elite Transition", best espoused on the South African political character, by Durban based scholar Patrick Bond, the political class has ignored the resistance of the people to domination, the increasing inequality, poverty and penury, unemployment and push to hopelessness and despair.

Kenya's crisis today, lies in this historical malady and the perpetuation of the concentration of power around the presidency, means that this "imperial" presidency is built on patronage and nepotism, and has access to power as the driving motif of any political persuasion and engagement.

Thus, the state is the site of accumulation of personal wealth, its protection and an assurance of a free rein to multiply it. This has been the perverse legacy of the Kenyatta, Moi and Kibaki regimes. Networks of patronage deepen, a powerful cabal of individuals runs the state persuading a strong, pervasive corruption network, whose interest is to use state coffers both for its enrichment and to perpetuate its hold onto power by any means.

This has been coupled by the ascription to the dictates of the global political and economic architecture with the overall embracing of deregulatory neo-liberalism as the dominant economic model.

Democracy has functioned as a mere facade to facilitate access to power. People's development and notions of the state as the pivotal development agency allocating values and resources in society takes a back seat.

Resultantly, the gulf between the rich and the poor continues to grow exponentially. With Kenya ranking both as one of the most unequal and corrupt nations in the world.

But to hold the edifice together, the powerful and dominant class has deliberately used the identity of ethnicity to persuade and entrench a notion of collective responsibility. Mirroring their gains in the context of their tribes and any criticism as an onslaught on the whole tribe(s) holding power at a particular moment. Kenyatta set the fertile ground for this with the rise of the infamous "Kiambu/Kikuyu" mafia that held sway in his government while Moi and Kibaki have only managed to deepen this, albeit in different shades.

Hence, valid discussions around equality, equity, social development and societal wellbeing are projected as a primordial competition of one tribe trying to gain the upper hand over the other. A misnomer that unfortunately even the international journalists, commentators and observers of Africa seem to buy line, hook and sinker!

The 2007 election has to be seen in the backdrop of sustained pressure to correct these historical injustices. Whereas the import of this is still debatable, I am of the opinion that the 2007 election afforded the opportunity when the Kenyan people were united in the conviction that they could correct these historical injustices through their democratic power. The ballot. As shown by the intensity of the political campaigns, the large voter turnout, the patience exhibited at the voting centers, the number of youth participation, ultimately the voting patterns exhibited and the massive increase in women's participation.

It is this contradiction that warrants a deeper outlook. Does Kenya have a class formation in the classical sense; a bourgeoisie (national and petit), a middle class or its upper variation, workers and a lumpen proletariat?

My take would be that the cleavages are not in black and white, but in massive shades of greys. What we have in Kenya is national elite that controls the political and economic realms and sets the agenda. It derives its sustenance on the ability to monopolize the state as the site of accumulation and its ability to link up to international capital albeit as a mere appendage. Its trough the 'shape-shifting' nature of this 'elite', from political office, to economic mandarins through civil service bureaucracy and back that sustains and informs its existence. Access to the state has been a supreme consideration in all instances. Whether its bourgeoisie, remains debatable.

In terms of a middle class, in its functioning role as a "class of ideas", I contend that what we have in Kenya is an aspiring intellectual and informed elite, which though lacking in the excesses of wealth, has at least enough from careers and other forms of employment, but is still in service of the bureaucratic state. Otherwise how else do you explain the big rush of professionals in civil service, civil society or private sector for parliamentary office? Certainly this is not founded on philanthropic altruistic notions of "service to mankind is service to God" but the appeal of entry into the political/economic Government machinery for more accumulation and wealth. Exceptions exist but less as a rule.

It is in this void that the 'ethnicization' of the political/economic process rears its ugly head. The "we" versus "them" typology plays on an "offensive", "defensive" abstraction that is interpreted in the context of the

competing/contending forces. Nothing about an explicit understanding of the political/economic dynamics at play.

But with the benefit of hindsight, it's now emerging more clearly on the adverse limitations of liberal democracy as a political process and especially when twinned with the debilitating effects of neo-liberalism and its attendant corporate led capital onslaught on all facets of life.

Thus we see that the defining moment of the Kenya crisis at the moment is not just the flawed elections but the historical construct of the state. In built are the changing roles of the various "elites" and how this transition from one set of "elite" to another at any material time plays itself out. This agency fails to fit into an identifiable structural function on the weight of its reliance on the state as the main lever of the coming and going, with the necessary ethnic mobilization.

Arguably, it's worth noting that the elections themselves were not a revolutionary attempt at reconfiguring the Kenyan society; they were merely a formal democratic exercise whose outcome however manifested the deep divisions existing between the poor urban working class, the peasantry and the lumpen proletariat. It's sad indeed that it's these deprived classes which are attempting to eliminate one another rather than their common enemy, the rich propertied classes. But again, this misnomer has to be located on the well entrenched and well propagated notion of an ethnic collective responsibility. The overwhelming belief that one is in a sense connected to the ethnic lords by some affinity and hence it warrants their defence in the face of the ascendancy of other groups. Such been the divide and rule script of colonial hangover.

A look through history

When Kenya gained independence in 1963, the seeds that would plague the nation today were sowed. Instead of embarking on an integrative reconstruction of the society to build a shared identity, Kenya under Kenyatta took the path of "everyone for themselves. Only the strongest survive." This was a well choreographed strategy to disinherit and cheat those who had fought for independence, best captured by the Mau Mau, their first victory. As such, the clarion call for Land and Freedom was extinguished. In its place, Kenyatta embraced former colonial home guards and their lackeys as the pillars of the independent nation. And in vintage Orwellian subscription, a "divide and rule", "some are more equal than others" perfection of the British colonial administrative policy was entrenched.

Such was the first betrayal.

Without embarking on a historical literature review, it is worth noting that the initial contestation of the independence space represented by the fallout between Kenyatta and Odinga, and best captured in the latter's seminal work, "Not Yet Uhuru" attests to this.

Whereas Odinga and company stood for a more equal society with guaranteed access for all, Kenyatta and his cabal adopted a more individualistic stance. Throw in the cold war dynamics and it was a pure conflict of what kind of a development model to adopt. Kenyatta stuck with the capitalist notion of "winner takes all" while Odinga and his group of socialist orientation of equality and social welfare were ostracized.

Thus Kenya missed the opportunity that Nyerere took in Tanzania. To build a cohesive nation through the integration of society.

But it would be long in coming.

With the independence "high" giving Kenyatta a blank cheque to manoeuvre, he set in motion the first most elaborate and deliberate pursuit to "ethnicize" politics. Such that, the all often embraced perception of a "Kikuyu" versus "Luo" conflict set the stage. More was to follow as ethnic identities and orientation served to service this juggernaut. Subsequent regimes have only served to entrench this.

While playing ethnicity as a political populist agenda reigned, a more instrumental policy to underwrite this orientation is superbly presented in the "Sessional Paper No.10 on African Socialism and its Implications and Principles on Economic Development." Whereas this is celebrated as a great blueprint for a nation emerging from colonialism, it set the basis for the neo-colonial agenda. With its broad adherence to the principles of capitalism and the emergent neo-liberal agenda, it served to divide the nation into compartments of "High Potential and Low Potential areas". Thus, the focus of the government would be on the "High Potential areas" and gains made this way, would trickle down to the "Low Potential areas". Thus the folly of trickle down economics was embraced as the development model and hope was generated that at the end of the day, all Kenyans would be lifted to new heights of development. Its worth noting that the high potential areas were mainly around the white highlands extending through central Kenya and the Rift Valley; the broader home of the Kikuyu and those who had been integrated earliest to the Colonial capitalist economy. A continuation of the "White Mischief" in other ways!

In the perspective of the nascent democracies in Africa and as captured by lots of work that we have done both in Kenya and across Africa, its illustrative to heed

insights by Patrick Bond who has written authoritatively on the elite deal making and pacting that wheels political processes with specific reference to South Africa. But this can also be applied to the Kenyan situation and in resonance present classic lessons for Africa and especially with reference to Zimbabwe and Swaziland on the pitfalls of electoral democracy.

Central themes are the state as the site of patronage and largesse. As such competing interests for access to the state are masked as pro-people challenges to the status quo in a quest to reassert peoples sovereignty and ability to secure their livelihoods.

With bankrupt ideological foundations an “elite’ cabal controls power across the Government, the civil service bureaucracy, the private sector and utmost the military. Gelling into an edifice that is purely anti-people, but on occasion needs to mask its interests in the language of the people to facilitate the “elite pacting” and transition for purposes of reinventing itself. But always, never breaking from the orthodoxy of neo-liberalism and neo colonial interests that continues to chain the people to servitude, poverty and penury. Otherwise how do you explain the emergence of the same faces on the power circuit at any give time period?

The failures of this elite transition in the Kenyan case is a telling scenario that the progressive forces in Zimbabwe, Swaziland and the rest of Africa need to pay attention to wholly and fashion comprehensive alternatives.

When all is said and done, this election was not between Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki. It was a quest by the Kenyan people to correct past injustices and re-orient their development priorities. With the sad outcome as it has turned out to be, in the end, the losers will be the Kenya people.

But while the situation remains tense in Kenya, and a relative calm prevails, it would be naïve to equate calm to a restoration of peace. For a grounded restoration of a new era of a more productive, stable and transformed Kenya, we must of essence eschew the values of inclusive democracy.

Former UN Secretary General who led the international mediation team to unlock the deadlock that set Kenya on the verge of precipice has said as much. That Kenya must address the deep seated structural issues that sign a death certificate for the significant number of the populace. It must be enforced by all people of goodwill that it cannot continue as business as usual. The onus is on both the political class to mid wife this new vision and for the citizenry to remain vigilant.

With both the theoretical and practical underpinnings, it is of great import that we the people of Kenya stand to challenge the Grand Narrative.

We must all embrace the paradigm shift that we are no longer talking about mere change and reform, but a holistic societal transformation. That Kenya is alive and the Kenyan peoples have refused to die but in the converse live for the nation's posterity. That through their monumental and transformative actions they are changing the terrain for the good. And this must be supported from all the relevant quarters with the interest of Kenya as a nation at heart. But that needs to be qualified, that we cannot have a nation of two worlds in one. One of excesses, exploitation, control and domination and another of penury, disease, hopelessness and death.

The Government must of essence support investment in Public Services as a matter of critical need and that there is an urgent need to develop a Social Policy for the nation based on Rights and Entitlements. A policy that puts Kenyans in the leadership of control, utilization and benefit from their multiple and varied ever occurring natural resources. We must not fuel the appetites of those who gobble our natural wealth with reckless abandon through pillage.

To assert People's sovereignty over their destinies we must be able to have new dreams. To envision new futures we need to develop new cosmologies, new metaphors that are devoid of violence and exploitation. We must be able to embrace marginalized groups. To found non-violence and peace building. To assert the democratization of peoples access to their natural resources for their own maximization. To reconstruct ethics and spirituality. To promote gender equality, economic and social rights. We must of essence rehabilitate and reconstruct politics. We must liberate the nation from the domination of multi-national and financial institutions. Of essence we must ensure universal and sustainable access to the common goods of humanity and nature. We have to ensure dignity, defend diversity and guarantee expression eliminating all forms of discrimination. By guaranteeing the rights to food, healthcare, education, housing and work we will be building a new Kenyan nation and order based on sovereignty, self-determination and rights of peoples. The tapestry of our diversity is our strength.