



REFLECTIONS ON POLITICAL AND GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The struggle for independence in Kenya was won through the experience and struggle against oppression and brutal exploitation of the Kenyan people. The need to overthrow all forms of oppression and exploitation constitutes the emergence of a tradition of struggle for social and political rights. The agenda is far from complete, particularly in the face of the new challenges that have arisen in the wake of uncritical liberalization, naively embraced by the Kenyan system of governance and political leadership. Leaders play a pivotal role in political agenda setting, the distribution of resources and political actions. The contemporary state in Kenya and Africa in general is a remnant of a colonially imposed system. At the time of independence, elites attempted to transform this but only succeeded in entrenching their interests. Political leaders are the primary holders, controllers and distributors of power and resources in a particular institution (i.e. institutional power) and/or territory (i.e. geo-political power). This includes leaders who gained power by ballots and those who gained power by bullets including warlords and vigilantes. For us to attain the Kenya and Africa we want, we need a positively assertive, tolerant and firm leadership to address constraints in our socio-political structures, economy and governance systems. Our Kenyan political structures have been poisoned by ethnicity and differences across social classes. For that, we require empathetic leadership since we have failed to use our diversity to enhance our growth and development as a country. We need leadership in which Kenyans develop their unique political institutions which they are sure will work best for our country and concurrently encourage global co-operation. We should strive for issue-based and solution seeking politics; not ethnic politics instituting wars and civil strife which have raged Africa across for decades where countries lucky to survive the aftermath have seen poverty, hunger, diseases, ignorance and political subjection. For our economy to thrive we need visionary leadership whereby our policies will eradicate corruption scandals and overdependence on foreign aid, ensure food security, sustain employment, encourage industrialization and critically, conserve the environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the result of deliberate preparation. It implies a relationship where someone leads another follows and it is complicated since in relationships, the other person rarely reacts as expected, so leaders need to constantly learn from their mistakes. Leadership therefore is simply exploiting one's potential, being a role model, giving hope and inspiring others to be the best they can be. For us to attain the Kenya and Africa we want, we need a positively assertive, tolerant and firm leadership to address constraints in our socio-political structures, economy and education systems. (Clapham, 2001). Our African political structures have been poisoned by ethnicity and differences across social classes. As such we require empathetic leadership since we have failed to use our diversity to enhance our growth and

development as a continent. We need leadership in which Kenya and generally Africans develop their unique political institutions which they are sure will work best for Africa and concurrently encourage global co-operation. For our economy to develop as a country we need visionary leadership whereby our policies will eradicate corruption scandals and overdependence on foreign aid, ensure food security, sustain employment, encourage industrialization and critically, conserve the environment. It is clear that with tolerant and dedicated leadership all African states will heal their divides and provide policies which will encourage investments. Every prosperous country is driven by the realization that good leadership is a fundamental pillar in its growth. Countries that are the envy of many in terms of economic development are propelled to such heights by exemplary leadership. What they see that other countries do not see is that leadership is not an opportunity to satisfy ones needs but rather to resuscitate that which seems to have gone wrong, to bring to life that which

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seems impossible and to improve that which already exists. According to Dorman (2006) the leadership currently exercised in Africa leaves a lot of doubt as to whether the dream of a self sufficient, economically developed Africa will be attained. Leadership should be the ability to guide and direct. However, leadership in Africa has taken up a new meaning. It is a chance for people in power to amass all the country's wealth and use it to build a better and more luxurious life for themselves. It is an opportunity to manipulate and coax the masses into believing that as leaders they have their best interests at heart. Africa needs leadership that is progressive and liberal. The world is rapidly changing due to changes in the technology world. The same is true of leadership. Dorman asserts that day in day out changes are taking place in leadership. Women are rightfully earning the top most jobs in their countries, for example Angel Merkel who is the German chancellor, and young leaders such as Barack Obama of America are coming up with policies meant to positively transform their countries. Africa needs leaders who are not tied down to accepted ways or some fossilized truths but leaders who are willing to go the extra mile and change beliefs held true by the society.

Political Economy of Inequality

Kenya's historical inequality can be traced to British colonization. Colonialism through expropriation, native reserves, hut taxes, compulsory labour, marketing boards and commodity monopolies, etc...created land scarcity and excess labour. Thus Kenya became a rent extraction colony. Institutions evolved to support high inequality. These institutions were not completely dissolved at independence; instead they were coopted by the new elite. Thus the political economy of inequality was maintained and ethicized as opposed to racialised. Consequently, the heart of political contestation in Kenya is the competition for scarce resources created by high inequality institutions. The relationship between inequality, class formation and political power has been the underlying motivating factor in Kenya's politics since the colonial period. However, there is little empirical research aimed at disentangling the linkages between class formation, high economic inequality and Kenya's political economy. This is despite the fact that inequality, conflict and social injustice are increasingly characteristic of Kenyan society. At the core of these linkages has been the development of a political system based on patronage i.e. a neo-patrimonial state. The institutional organization of the Kenyan state grants the Executive, more specifically, the President sweeping powers of patronage. Consequently it has led to imperative of political mobilization as well as self-serving interest have transformed this custodianship of national wealth enjoyed by the state into a potent tool of economic exploitation and exclusion for some and a vehicle for accumulation and social ascendancy for others.

Economic inequality can influence the development of institutions and institutions can influence the development of inequality. These institutions in turn determine public policy, which, because of the centrality of the state in the development process determine the long term trajectory of social and economic development. This in a nutshell, is the hypothesis underlying the argument that economic inequality in Kenya is a result of the functioning of its political

and economic institutions. It has been argued that in land-scarce and labour-abundant conditions; political economy favours so-called the well connected and therefore high inequality institutions which perpetuate policies that reinforce economic exclusivity. (World Bank, 2006)

Politics and conflict in Kenya revolve around two key issues; competition/control over productive land and ethnic/regional opportunities for economic gains. Thus historically, issues of economic inequality have centered on access to agricultural land and control of the state, the means by which the dominating elite can create economic empowerment. This has been the case since colonization when the colonial authority began the process of alienating land from Africans in favour of supposedly more productive European commercial farmers. This created a powerful vested interest in colonial Kenya which had disproportionate influence on public policy and used it to its advantage. Although much less brazen since independence, the practice of biasing policy in favour of certain groups has continued post-independence. There could be various reasons for this but in an ethnically divided and unequal country such as Kenya, the basic political problem could be surmised as how to determine policy from among so many conflicting regional agendas and demands for resources. The solution Kenya's post-independence political leaders chose is a political system based on ethnic patronage. Political parties then become vehicles to funnel the perks of loyalty to ethnic elites as well as sounding boards for ethnic grievances and aspirations.

Thus Kenya's political parties have been and are ever increasingly fronts for ethnic political interests. It is implicitly understood by voters that whichever ethnic alliance succeeds will deliver economic dividends to its regional/ethnic base and whichever loses will be frozen out. This is because of the underlying structure of power/ economic relations in Kenya. The elite through its control of the means of economic power creation (the state) and its distribution consolidates its hold on power and wealth through webs of reciprocal patron client relations. In other words, the Kenyan elite preside over a system that appropriates the best economic opportunities through its control over the state and its institutions. This configuration militates against social cohesion and promotes ethno-regional inequality. It also reinforces the vicious circle from high inequality to power concentration and low institutional quality to poverty. In this regard, an important aspect of public policy that has been at the centre of controversy at various stages in the country's history is that of overall economic policy. The choices with regard to economic policy have often been motivated by a desire to protect the interest of invested capital and the dominant elite and this has shaped at crucial stages the response of policymakers to emerging events e.g. the response of the colonial government to growing unrest in the Native Reserves in the 1940's and 1950's which led to a radical shift in rural development policy by the colonial government once the prevailing system was seen as unviable. In general, economic policy in Kenya can be construed as supporting the essential interests of the dominant elite. Indeed throughout the history of post-independence Kenya, a key concern of economic policy has been precisely to protect these interests in the name of pragmatism and economic stability.

Social Policy, Development and Governance

Social stratification refers to the hierarchical organization of society; thus caste systems and class systems are examples of stratification systems albeit based on different criteria or 'orders'. The way a society is stratified depends on its general characteristics e.g. its levels of economic and political development. In general social stratification appears to be the norm among state-level cultures. Non-state or stateless cultures may also be characterized by some form of stratification e.g. between elders and youth, shamans and the profane etc... In the Kenyan context, prior to colonization many large communities e.g. were 'stateless' or decentralized lacking a national government, feudal aristocracy, well defined frontiers or some of the other trappings associated with states. Instead the frontiers that mattered were local (for instance between villages). The behaviour of the elite in instrumentalisation of power for its economic interests specifically through its control of economic policy corresponds to the Marxist idea of the relationship between ruling class interests and the state. It can be argued that in Kenya, the process of class formation is a by-product as well as a motor of the politically motivated redistribution of economic opportunities to favoured groups. Thus economic policy has purposefully created widespread economic inequality, creating a situation where the competition for political power is the key to economic advancement. This process has since independence assumed an ethno-regional expression in part as a result of the exigencies of power consolidation under different regimes (Syagga, 2005)

In regard to Syagga (2005), these factors lead us to a supposition that class formation, inequality and economic development are intimately linked. The ruling interests in the state would use their control over the state to reward interests or factions that are crucial to its hold on power. Moreover, for historical reasons, we would expect that the development of class would differ regionally; those parts of the country in particular the former White Highlands that have the most developed commercial agriculture i.e. where land has become an economic asset would exhibit the most stark manifestations of this process of economic consolidation between the haves and have notes. This is not the same as saying that the poor in those regions are the poorest in the country but that the gap between the best off and the worst off is larger than the national average. In Kenya class formation has been highly evident with the gap between the rich and the poor dramatically increasing over years. There is a growing demand for the government to come up with a social policy which should provide economic interventions for the promotion of human wellbeing and development. The policy should be able to address strategies, incentives and sanctions that promote access to and remove obstacles from basic needs for the marginalized and poor. The measures should range from certain strategic social services such as basic education, primary health care, social security and housing to other necessities such as citizen safety and security. On the other hand we would expect to see far less divergence between the best and worst off in those areas that have been marginalized from the capitalist economy. Other manifestations of class-based inequality such as regards education and health would also follow these lines. The elites of these regions might send their children to private schools or even abroad while the poor

have no choice but local public or community schools. We would also expect to see regional differences i.e. the elite at a national level may be dominated by people from certain communities thus highlighting the reality of unequal opportunities engendered by the political systems over time.

Gender imbalance

Kenyan women have been continuously sidelined in politics and in key positions since independence. This is despite the fact that they make up about 51% per cent of Kenya's population. The patriarchal society in which Kenyan women operate ensures male domination of political and public life. As a result women have not had equal opportunities to contribute to society, especially in decision making or leaders. In some communities, it is a taboo for a woman to compete with a man and as such, men do not face any major competition for electoral positions. Continued women's marginalization in governance and political positions has contributed to the denial of women's human rights, their unequal access to resources and to the disempowerment of women in general and this has led to inequitable participation in the development process. If women participate in governance, there will be equitable and sustainable development decision that will improve both the quality of life of communities. It is important to note that the only way to achieve equitable representation for women is by anchoring gender equity and equality principles in the constitution. This argument is fuelled by the fact that Kenya is a signatory to some of the most important international instruments, which declare the equality of sexes and fundamental human rights. It has ratified among other: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Leadership of the future

Today in our country Kenya, our economy is not only weakened but it is in turmoil. There are thousands of poverty stricken citizens and homeless people. Our nation is at war and our hope for a brighter tomorrow has been threatened. This has been blamed by many on politics and failed policies that have characterized our governance systems for a long time. There is a need for Kenyans to demand for strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands to guide us past this stormy desert to green pastures, still waters and rest. The people of Kenya have to take the future into their own hands by putting an end to the petty grievances, false promises and worn out policies that have strangled our politics for far too long. There should be no more of protecting narrow interests. Kenyans should break the shackles of ethnicity and prejudice that has slowed down development. As such Kenyans should go beyond planning and take up an incremental and gradual approach to investment. The leadership we so obviously yearn for lies amongst Kenyans. There is need to realize that we are our own leaders. For the African dream to be realized it is important to build up an effective leadership system where the leader is caring for the needs of the subject and the subject has confidence in the decision the leader makes. In order to the Kenya and Africa we want we should have strong and confident leaders who can face the challenge they encounter in

the task of nation building. Leaders should be united among themselves and be able to make strong decisions that can lead the country to a prosperous future without any external pressure. They should have strong views towards their responsibilities as decision makers and feel that the future of the whole society is in their hands. Kenya needs leaders who can make smart, powerful economic decisions which will enable us to achieve our development goals. We need to achieve an economy that can support the economical well-being of every Kenyan. In order for Kenya to develop effective and efficient governance system it is important for the government to uphold the following measures:-

Participation

- Participation by both men and women
- Either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives.
- It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making.
- Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand.

Rule of law

- Fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially
- Full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities
- An independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force

Transparency

- Decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations
- Information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement.
- Enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media.

Responsiveness

- Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

Consensus oriented

- Mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved
- A broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development.

Equity and inclusiveness

- Ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society

- All groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being.

Effectiveness and efficiency

- Processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal.
- The sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Accountability

- Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. In general an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions.
- Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.

Conclusion

Africa needs leaders, who are able to envision positive change, leaders with a plan of action on how to propel their country to greater development: a plan of action that sets goals that will challenge the people to work hard intelligently. The leadership Africa needs is one that is able to visualize a developed Africa and drive all its efforts to the realization of this dream. Projects like vision 2030 which hopes to see Kenya a fully developed state has everyone working towards the attainment of this well defined goal. Moreover, Kenya needs a kind of leadership which is responsible and accountable. Most of the Kenyan leaders are unable to fully explain the distribution of their country's national income and sadly at the end of it, the common citizen is left struggling to make ends meet hoping that someday the leaders will take up their responsibility and account for their term in service. Kenya and Africa needs leaders that take up their responsibility with all honesty, seriousness and transparency so that at the end of the day Africa's and Kenya's development is attributed to the accountability of its leaders. Kenya has a dream, Africa has a dream; to ensure that every child has access to education, to provide health care for all, and not just any health care but the best money can buy: a dream to see African countries controlling a greater part of the global economy, and to see everyone with decent shelter and a decent job. All this is possible, but only the African leaders hold the key to the realization of this dream. Kenya needs charismatic and transparently elected leaders.

The concept of leadership has radically evolved from lording over people to one of service. Current and upcoming African leaders need to embrace this new form of servant leadership. Heads of state should run their governments like modern companies with the focus being on quality service delivery to its citizens and their satisfaction being its motivation. In a nutshell, Africans and especially their leaders need to work together, in their diverse and respective positions to make the UN millennium development goals a reality

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some recommendations that can be put into place in order to improve the leadership and governance systems in Kenya:-

Training and Education

The government to build national capacity to implement and apply good governance and leadership practices by facilitating an increased range of training opportunities for the youth and other people aspiring to be leaders through exposing and educating them on good governance principles and practices.

Research and Development

There is need to contribute to the continued improvement and refinement of the principles of good governance by enhancing research through studying, documenting and understanding how current systems operate, the obstacles to good governance and the potential for improvement.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Developing criteria, mechanisms and systems to monitor and evaluate the extent to which the government embrace, apply and implement good leadership and governance principles and practices and to assess the impact that this has on improving national efficiency and competitiveness, enhancing wealth production, and generating employment.

Advocacy and communications programmes

Sensitizing, motivating and influencing policy makers, political leaders and community leaders to embrace and promote good governance principles; to motivate the participation and involvement of the citizens in actively demanding good governance system for sustainable wealth creation, increased employment opportunities and so on through efficient, responsible, integrity-based leadership that is transparent and accountable in all fields of human endeavour; and to involve the general public in developing a national framework of values, ethics and ethos for good governance.

Knowledge Management

The government should establish a resource center and databank on governance, publicizing and disseminating research results and studies showing the extent to which bad governance practices and corruption jeopardize national economic performance, the quality of life of citizens and employment opportunities, and disseminating information to promote policy dialogue on good leadership and governance measures.

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