Youth And Nation Building In Kenya: Prospects And Challenges.

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Abstract :
This article explores the challenges associated with youth exclusion in the Kenyan policy processes and the consequences of the same. It observes that while people between the ages 18 to 35 form the largest proportion of the Kenyan adult population only a small proportion of them take part in the nations policy processes. Resulting from this exclusion is high unemployment rate. While the national unemployment rate is estimated to be 10% that of the people aged 15 to 16 is at 20%, 20 years old, at 35 %, 25 and 30 year old at 25%. Stemming from the youth unemployment is the high crime, substance abuse and HIV prevalence rate. The paper recommends that concrete policy efforts should be made to increase youth participation in the national building process. Pertinent to these efforts is the availability of forums for youth interest aggregation and articulation at local and national policy dialogue platforms.

1. INTRODUCTION

The youth is closely related to socio-economic development and to processes of social change. In the discussions of international donors and NGOs children and youth have traditionally been perceived as victims (of mal development as well as of violence), while the current debate focuses on youth as a security problem (e.g. youth militia groups). But for most developing societies, youth represents an important potential for development. The challenge for county, national governments as well as international donors is how youth can be integrated into development and peace-building projects in spite of social stratification and limited economic prospects.

The role of the youth in Kenya could be addressed in the contemporary fashion, addressing the role of youth in development. The role of youth in development is almost a cliché, but its role in

Conflict is a growing concern. The youth are often victims of conflict, and a disturbing dimension of conflict is the growing role of youth in fomenting conflict, as tools or instruments. While the role of young people as peace agents is a global concern, one particularly disturbing dimension is the role of youth in 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya. This phenomenon started with Kenya youth parliament; but it has developed into a grim reality and a formidable political force in Kenya. This excludes a growing section of the youth from mainstream society, and development because it comprises of the youth mainly from urban centres. This phenomenon poses a latent threat to peace and security, as witnessed in recent developments. Whether internal or external, the majority of these youth were recruited into militia groups such as mungiki, talipans, kamjesh, chinkororo among others. What role do militia group youth recruitment play in development? In what ways is

this role challenging for the state? How has this role formed a linkage with terrorism or post-election violence? While the role of the youth group has been under scrutiny, the role of the young people has an impact beyond the militia group or their ethnic communities and beyond the borders of our country.

2. Youth in Development and Peace-Building

In every human society, people must learn how to co-exist with others. According to Chukwu mutual respect and understanding are of enormous value for societal existence, engagements in joint business ventures and for orderly progress in various facets of human endeavours (Chukwu, 2002: 158). To inculcate this very important virtue calls for socialization background right from childhood. Africans before the coming of the Europeans lived peacefully in their communities. John S. Mbiti's statement "I am, because we are; and since we, therefore are I am" echoes the essence of communitarian respect which is inseparable in an African living (Mbiti, 1969:106). In spite of rapidly increasing wave of egoistic inclinations, the value of togetherness cannot be discounted. The disheartening wave of selfish and violence can be related to the outcome of materialistic civilization. In a nutshell, if there is no peaceful coexistence there would be no society and without society there would be no development and prosperity in the proper sense of the word.

As the quest for truth and peaceful co-existence continues, youth are the key actors. Youth helped in the revamping of our political culture and economic structure which to a large extent will alleviate poverty in the society.

This paper presents findings from the role of the Youth in the recent 2007-2008 post-election violence and young people's perspectives on the causes and consequences of this on-going crisis.

Drawing on these findings, we focus on the role political leaders played in promoting community violence; how the ethnic divisions were manipulated; why some youth were easily influenced to fight; and how young people see revenge and payback for past injustices fuelling the current problems in Kenya. Mwaruvie John for instance, observes that problems in Kenya have been simmering beneath the surface of what seemed to be a peaceful state. The climax of this unresolved societal conflict led to ethnic cleansing in the name of protests against the claimed rigging of the presidential votes during the December 2007 General Election (Mwaruvie,2008:268-269).Therefore, the government should put an end to the historical injustices in Kenya such which are the triggers of conflicts. Some of the historical injustices include land grabbing, extrajudicial killings, torture among others. Youth have unique and important insights into the causes and consequences of violence in their communities. In this paper we argue that providing young people with avenues to critically examine the social and political aspects of conflict is both empowering in its own right and fundamental to the success of any peace-building activities in Kenya.

3. CHALLENGES FACING NATION BUILDING AND YOUTH IN KENYA

a) Overall disparity in distribution of national resources

Youth are the main stakeholders, policy makers and a major resource group playing an important role in taking up responsibilities, revolutionizing the other stakeholders, acting as a catalyst for bringing about change. They are leaders even now in their own right; hence, the word future is misplaced by those who refer the youth as future leaders. Hence, these leaders have immense potential to mobilize the masses, be adaptable and act as a link between the two generations. However, the chief economist at the ministry of

youth and sports, Mr Isaac Kamande notes that there are nearly 2.5 million unemployed youth in the country. He observed that barely 125,000 are annually absorbed into formal employment which today has nearly 1.8 million employees but the informal sector, which has about 8 million workers, absorbs the most. The problem of youth unemployment is a global issue that needs to be addressed urgently. According O.M.J. Nandi, poverty is a major cause that had driven children into the streets and criminal behaviour (Nandi, 2002:150-151). Despite their many talents and assets, more and more young people around the world are finding themselves without jobs or livelihoods. Critical to most people's survival, work also helps define a significant part of which we are and what we can achieve when time is ripe, work taps our creativity and maximizes our potential enabling us to contribute to society and to build community with those around us.

Unemployment however, erodes confidence fevers connecting and fuels feelings of what they are and what they can contribute .For those who are unsuccessful, the consequences can be devastating and long term. Youth employment follows several mutually reinforcing tracks. Young people should be equipped with the knowledge and skills in order to actively participate in the "new economy" through an emphasis on information technology that enables them in getting and keeping a job. Therefore, the Kenya government should have better policies that focus greater attention and resources on effective ways to combat youth unemployment in the country. This can be achieved through youth empowerment and sensitization program. However, many Kenyans attribute their state to the failure of government to provide an enabling environment for job creation and infrastructure development (Chelanga, Ndege $Singo, 2009:51). This call for the Kenya government to map its human resources because this will enable it tell

which skill is found where, and direct special program to that area. For instance job opportunities which will be our next point of discussion.

b) Job opportunities

The number of unemployed youth in Kenya is alarming. According to Inonda Mwanje, chief executive officer of institute of policy analysis and research predicted that the number of unemployed youth in Kenya could rise to 14 million over the next seven years. He further stated that this high number of jobless youth could spark off a people's revolution if it is not tamed on time. Kenya's statistics indicate that over two million youths in the country are out of work and another 75, 0000 join this lot every year from educational institutions. This shows that if youth unemployment is not addressed now, we are creating a class problem. This is a matter of urgency that the government should seek short and eventually long term solutions. The figure of unemployed youth is 1.9 million, majority of them aged 15 and 24 years.

c) Poor governance in Kenya

As indicated earlier, most of the problems emanating from the manipulation of politics or governance in Kenya are created by the individuals from tribes and not the whole tribe as such. A fact to be pointed out here is that, individual people or tribes have no intrinsic problems with each other; they normally co-exist peacefully till political leaders poison their thinking. This political system has put many common folks to think exclusively in the lenses of their own tribe hence, falling victims of negative ethnicity. O.M.J. Nandi argues that problems such as ethnicity in awarding employment opportunities, ethnic cleansing or politically instigated violence, lack of opportunities, or

women becoming widowed, divorced or separated from their husbands, have complicated the problem of poverty and children in this region (Nandi, 2002: 154). These common folks are in the cave of their own tribal cocoons; that is, they are enslaved and imprisoned in the cave of Plato. Plato contends in the allegory of the cave that, the common folks which happen to be the majority should ascend to see the things in the upper world where they would be in possession of what is objective and good for the whole humanity. This implies that people will be in a position to embrace the truth or the lord of light that is, intelligence and truth (Plato, 1941).

d) Negative ethnicity in Kenya – a challenge to nation building

Negative ethnicity in Kenya influences all the activities of the state such as political, socio-economic, cultural just to mention a few. That is why politicians and their ethnic supporters view ascendancy of one to a political office as an opportunity of his or her ethnic group to assert, "It is our turn to eat." Ndungu N.W. succinctly states that politically motivated ethnic clashes have resulted in the loss of life and destruction of the property acquired over long periods while the economies of these countries have been shattered (Ndungu, 2002: 139). At the moment, this kind of behaviour is inevitable unless education system is changed. Rampant corruption, tribalism and other vices was a sign that education had failed to mould students into better citizens. Quality education has slipped out of the reach of many. As indicated earlier, ideas such as abolishing the current system where 85 per cent of pupils admitted to secondary schools within their locality should be embraced. Revision of school curricula to lay greater emphasize on appreciation of our various cultures should be explored. To be able to change the system of education more focus should be placed on early

childhood (Daily Nation 12.4.2010). This appears to be the long-term measures which will help heal the ethnic rifts and hence save this country from intricacies associated with negative ethnicity. For education to be meaningful to society, it should help in solving contemporary challenges as well as embracing the spirit of modernization which is geared towards creating a single world order inclusive of all ethnic groups. We need an education which inculcates in students attributes of tolerance, diversity etc.

The notion of governance requires a mental shift both by political class and the general public. Furthermore, Kumar Rupesinghe argues that governance of multi-ethnic society requires active participation of civil society and development of culture of tolerance (Kumar,1996). An ethic of corruption has percolated deep into the civil service in Kenya and thus lacks meritocracy because their appointments into the office were political. The mother of all corruption in Kenya is due to political culture in Kenya which does not embrace the spirit of ethnic tolerance and meritocracy. All these lead to bad feeling by those who feel that they are unfairly discriminated against.

e) luxuries, evil thought and societal commitments

Luxuries, evil thoughts and societal commitments also gain youth attraction to a great extent. In search of the above three, the youth is losing its identity and goals in no time. In the contemporary Kenya society people are completely neglecting the ethical values and ruining the moral education they had learned during childhood. It is impossible for anyone to escape from these unless they are self-confident to control themselves. Just like any other development goals, the success of this goal would move all people above the humanizing levels of absolute poverty and keep

all of them from sinking back into that absolute poverty (Miriam K.W., 2007: 6). Self-controllability is the only measure to save oneself from evil habits. But this needs to be enhanced by certain moral belief in society.

f) Drugs, alcohol, smoking and undesirable sexual behaviour

Drugs, alcohol, smoking, undesirable sexual behaviour also hinder nation's building. If our beloved youth of this great nation is addicted to any of these activities, one can easily predict that, the destruction has started both as an individual and nation at large. This is because one has to realize the necessity of being healthy in almost every aspect of life. If youth is to make his/her country develop, one has to sacrifice not only their lives by protecting their country at the borders but also has to protect from internal threats, and make the society a healthy place to live in. This is only possible if the youth realize the importance of staying healthy by sacrificing selfishness, laziness, evilness and by thinking dedicatedly for the growth of the nation. As a proud Kenyan youth, who is proud of its rich and varied heritage, should take an oath whole heartedly that he/she should for the development of the nation's is its human resource be a contributing factor.

g) Gangster as a counter culture

Poor planning in the sector of employment into civil service jobs and other public corporations in the country has led to the notion of counter culture among the youth. According to Chukwu, counter culture refer to all attitudes of living or actions expressed by a person, group, or people that are opposed to or counteract the traditional norms or values of a people or humanity and which are considered preposterous, constitute as modes of living which are immoral or anti-social in a state or society as well as to the international community. Despite the fact that anti-social

activities that are deliberately aimed at undermining individual and societal constructive efforts towards socio-economic and intellectual endeavours, counter culture also include destructive habits and activity. The worldwide recognized counter culture includes organized crime, abortion, alcohol abuse, criminal behaviours, and relativistic nature among others.

4. THE IMPACT OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ON DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE BUILDING

In Kenya the population of youth has been growing rapidly and currently forms about 60% of the total population. This segment of the population in the society has been excluded from participating in the country's development and peace building due to unemployment, inaccessibility to information, low education level, vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, non-involvement in governance and human right issues. These factors make youth vulnerable to violence since they are polarized and marginalized.

The recent 2007-2008 political violence in Kenya in which more than 1000 people died, and development that had been realized in some parts of the country was destroyed within a period of one month. According to Pius Male, peace demands working for establishing justice and fair ways of treating and leaving with each other, establishing just structures, respecting protecting and promoting rights and duties of citizens (Male, 2008: 167). Statistics showed that the majority of those who participated in the violence were youth and over ninety per cent of those who died were also youth.

4. KENYA YOUTH; BUILDING A FUTURE

In this paper we argue that youth in some parts of the country have initiated viable projects such as bicycle transport industry which has played an

important role in socio-economic development. For example, Moi University Boda Boda Service (MUBBS), Bungoma Boda Service and the "peer healing and reconciliation "group in Eldoret has contributed to peace building. The bicycle transport initiative was started as an informal economic activity by the unemployed youth with an objective of creating employment for themselves. The transport system is used to transport people in the rural areas where there are no other means of transport due to poor roads. Through this transport system, members of the community are able to move within the communities without feeling insecure. The initiative that involved the use of bicycles in the beginning has now included the use of motorbikes and Tuktuk. The bicycle transport has made the youth understand the need for security if they have to continue with their business.

Through this economic activity, the youth are able to participate in peace building by sensitising their peers on the importance of peaceful environment as a prerequisite for their bicycle transport success. This initiative keeps the youth active and hence unable to engage in violence. However, the disdain for menial tasks creates artificial unemployment, since almost all educated people strive to secure the few white-collar jobs available on the job market (Sumani, 2008: 317). Equally then are contributing to the socio-economic development of this country.

v) **YOUTH MAKES A NATION**

Many at ties the understanding of a youth is conceived differently in different places. In this paper a youth is that spark which needs no ignition. Youth is that clay which can be moulded in a shape that one wants. It is here that we argue that the sole reason for both exploitation and utilization of youth in the destruction and construction of any nation is witnessed. Without any contradiction nation's building is highly dependent on youth. It is a fact that youth is that powerful force, which can either construct or destruct the whole nation. More still, youth should step forward to take up on their responsibility in developing the nation. However, youth are not given a proper chance to prove their potentials in our country. It is also surprising that youth fail to display the same enthusiasm in nation's building which we often display for getting a head in traffic.

It is observed that the youth who always fight for enjoying their rights, never wish to take up the pains of responsibility. Despite their education, many youth are misguided to a large extent by some evil forces making them irresponsible towards the society they live in. It is true that youth are highly amendable, but one must show the guts to take up the challenge to guide the youth to a correct path.

vi) **YOUTH BUILDS A NATION**

Nation building refers to a constructive process of engaging all citizens in building social cohesion, economic prosperity and political stability in an inclusive and democratic way. There is no other resource that matches the human being, because mankind is the foundation or the corner stone of any development and civilization. Out of the human intellect a nation is built. This can be confirmed by the fact that many countries are able to attain steady growth and development with limited natural resources through the intelligence of their people and the labour force. That is why young people are a crucial segment of a nation's development. Young people are social actors of change as the saying goes "youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also what has been planted." Hence it is suicidal to ignore this vital segment of society in any development agenda.

The government and society at large is equally tasked with the responsibility to provide the youth with suitable grounds for socio-economic development. They bring about a mature and responsible population for the coming generation to lead better life. It is good to have these structures in place but if the youth do not make the best use of them, no beneficial result will be realized. Youth must be ready and willing to take up any advantage of opportunity which comes their way. It is important to note that we cannot all work in offices; therefore, some youth would have to train themselves to be welders, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, craftsmen and farmers among others. But this is only possible if we have a liberating form of education.

vii) Pragmatic ways in which the government should address youth unemployment

The creation of employment opportunities in Kenya such as Reforestation program is necessary. To engage the youth, the government could establish a national reforestation program, starting with the MAU complex, with the aim of recapturing the globally recommended 10% forest cover across the country. However, reforestation program should not be done to please the donors or the world but for the betterment of our country. This gesture will have restored our rivers and saved this country from the negative effects of global warming. The restoration of all water towers in the country should be prioritized by the government as it will go along side with creation of jobs for the youth in the country. This will equally restore the rain patterns which currently are unpredictable. Capital youth caucus association national chairman, Jared Akama says there is a need to identify resources in different parts of the country and establish relevant industries so that the youth could be employed there. Youth are the most available and reliable manpower which should be utilized. Mr Akama

further argues that 48,000 member organization crusades for, among other issues, youth employment, expresses concern that most projects by the government are introduced without consulting the youth or sensitizing them about the projects.

The aim of this paper is to establish a partnership between the various stakeholders such as government institutions, NGOs, UNEP and the youth, to provide the resource and skills for environment problem solving and capacity building. More importantly, it focuses on ways to reduce consumption, eliminate waste, protect eco systems, think about life-cycles and promote equity, with the focus on "education for sustainability". Considering the school as a focal point/ cultural hub for interrelation with the community, the authors of this paper advocate sustainable living through partnerships. "Together we stand".

The government and other stakeholders should empower the students and youth to mobilize the communities and improve environmental actions through the linked steps of assessment, awareness, action and advocacy. For this, youth work with different stakeholders towards training, monitoring and validation, networking and implementation of action. Issues addressed through the projects were air, water, waste, energy, trees, herbal treasure, food adulteration, festivals, etc.

For the success of this project, the government should use media for communication and interaction to create global message platform on sustainable development, consumption and behaviour pattern to create alternative Environment vision. In other words, if the government is to raise the economic growth rate of this country to double digit, she has to approach socio-economic development holistically. This

involves taking up issues of sustainability and creating responsiveness on issues like youth empowerment, air safeguard, water protection, and organic cultivation of food.

viii) YOUTH HEADING FOR 2030 AMID ECHOES OF THE PAST

We are in a global and digital world that most of the youth have embraced. The majority of the youth grabs hold of Information Technology (IT) express and have caught a ride into the future. Those who have mastered Information Technology know-how, the youth will help Kenya achieve vision 2030, a national-level policy that seeks to create a skilled IT workforce and transformation of Kenya into the Information hub of Africa (Macharia and Misia, 2007:61-68). These aspirations and investments for the future are made in the country still tending the scars of the 2007-2008 tribal wars between different tribes. That bloody power struggle left many people dead and caused the phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The nation strives toward reconciliation and pursues one of the continent's most ambitious agenda to improve her economy through information technology capacities. Youth who participated in Healing and Reconciliation kept hearing echoes from the tragic past. Youth sharing has played an important role in the destiny of our country and has shaped youth career. The youth mission has helped them become better people, to think outside the box, and most of all has inspired them make a difference in their communities. The education system and all their studies should give them better understanding on how they can use their studies as a medium of positive change in society. Fusion of education and passion for moral life will create a unique and challenging youth career that will satisfy the needs of the society as well as the betterment of the community.

In the recent years, the country has seen the youth of this great nation lacking moral character and judgment. The breakdown of our youth stems from many reasons, popular culture, bad parenting, and lack of role models. The popularity of beguiled celebrity and popular culture has not enforced respectable role models for our youth. Unfortunately, many parents are not teaching their children values and respects because they have no time for such. The responsibility of developing ethics all too often rest in the education systems. Building character and cultivating values in our youth demands teaching these principals to children. Schools can incorporate ethics and values in our youth as well as character education as part of the curriculum. Real values are taught at homes by examples and good character of parents.

Promoting early development of ethical values in children teaches a child to live a virtuous life. The education system has long taught students to be good citizens and they have endorsed not plagiarizing. Character education programs encourage school curriculum to advocate problem solving skills for students. By teaching emotional management, anger control, impulse control and stress management, the education can produce quality individuals. This standards help decrease crime, violence, and school dropouts that have plagued our country.

ix) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the authors of this paper are of the view that for any possible or viable socio-economic development of Kenya, the youth should be part of this agenda; otherwise such as development will only be a form of mirage.

Therefore the writers of this paper recommend that:

- The youth of this country should be properly utilized for the wellbeing of the socio-economic development of this country. It is imperative that youth from all parts of the country participate actively in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.
- Kenya government should ensure that youth are provided a secure and healthy future, including an environment of quality, improved standards of living and access to education and employment. These issues need to be addressed in development planning.
- The government should, in consultation with its youth groups, establish a process to promote dialogue between the youth community and Government at all levels and to establish mechanisms that permit youth access to information and provide them with the opportunity to present their perspectives on government decisions and any other important decision that affect them for the sake of inclusive participation in government affairs to which they are part.
- Efforts should be made to eliminate voter bribery from the Kenyan electoral processes. Voter bribery has ensured that is a preserve of the rich. Youth who most are unemployed cannot afford to participate in politics because voters will demand that they are rewarded upfront before voting. Without which even if you have very strong points no one will give you a hearing.

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