

## Fostering National Identity through Selected National Values for Economic Transformation in Kenya

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### Introduction

National identity is the feeling of belonging to a particular nation. It is an experience that pushes one to act in the best interest of the nation. National identity can be built through shared values. Kenya is cognizant of this fact and has identified values of patriotism, rule of law, national unity and democracy, and public participation that cut across different ethnic groups as part of its national values to create a national identity. Further, Kenya adopted these values as part of the 17 national values as a foundation for its national development plan, the Kenya Vision 2030, which aims to transform the country into a middle-income economy characterized by an annual sustained economic growth of 10%, a just and cohesive society with equitable social development, and an issue-based, people-centered, result-oriented and accountable political system. Studies have shown that a country has the potential to achieve economic transformation if its citizens practice values they identify with. A strong national identity is geared to translate into economic transformation.

Despite the benefits derived from having a strong sense of national identity, the inadequacy of the values promoting national identity is threatening the success of transforming our country as defined in the Kenya Vision 2030. The poor national identity is observed through passive citizenry evidenced by voters' apathy, with voter turnout reducing from 85% in 2013 to 65% in 2022. Weak national identity is also observed through weak adherence to rule of law, evidenced by a rise in crime of 16.7% in the period between 2020 and 2021. The ethnic clashes experienced in the North Rift region of Baringo, West Pokot and Elgeyo Marakwet in mid-2022 and which resulted to a 60-day dusk-to-dawn curfew is an indication of weak national identity.

Weak national identity systems often lead to socio-economic breakdown. This is because citizens will look for identity elsewhere, which would be detrimental to both the individual and the nation. This could be through ethnic and even racial identity. These forms of identity threaten cohesiveness in a nation and, as such, groups tend to be hostile to people outside the group. Weak national identity also threatens economic transformation as citizens are less motivated to actively participate in the governance process through public participation and holding their leaders accountable. This has the effect of increasing leakages through corruption that re-allocates resources from productive to less productive activities that cannot produce the required 10% economic growth needed for economic transformation. The weak national identity that results in weak adherence to rule of law inhibits the creation of a conducive environment for investments required to spur necessary growth for economic transformation.

There have been various interventions to promote national identity in the country. This has been done through establishing various institutions such as the Directorate of Cohesion and Values, National Cohesion and Integration Commission, Ethic and Anti-Corruption Commission, and National Gender and Equality Commission, among others, to spearhead adherence to national values. Further, Kenya developed a policy on national values in 2013 to address challenges surrounding the implementation of national values in Kenya in fostering national identity. National culture and heritage policy was developed to promote national identity by recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity, making it part of who we are that is different but indifferent. Sessional Paper No. 9 of 2013 on national cohesion and integration was adopted to foster national identity in the country. However, these interventions have not effectively translated into the

creation of a strong national identity, despite having been inculcated in the national values in Kenya.

### **Barriers to National Identity**

There are several barriers that are hindering the creation of national identity through national values. These gaps include weak institutions, weak social capital, leadership crisis, low economic development, high youth unemployment, weak use of patriotic marketing and inequality and unequitable distribution of resources.

#### **Political environment**

Although institutions have been set up to help build a strong national identity in the country by promoting adherence to national values linked with national identity, the institutions have not been adequately strengthened to foster national identity. This is evidenced by the National Gender and Equality Commission, whose ethnic audit report revealed the presence of ethnic exclusion that serves to undermine national identity in public sector jobs at the national and county levels only served to raise awareness. Recommendations of the report are yet to be actioned by the various institutions that were reported non-compliant to the National Cohesion Index -NCI (2008) Act requiring no one ethnic group take up more than a third of jobs in the public sector and CGA (2012), and which outlines that no one group should take up more than 70% of entry-level positions of jobs. This Act is meant to promote national identity by ensuring inclusivity.

#### **Gaps in political institutions**

Gaps in political institutions such as the legislature, political parties, electoral bodies, civil society and the media act as barriers to the practice of democratic values in Kenya. They are weak in promotion of democratic values such as mobilization of citizens to participate in elections, recruitment of candidates through party nominations, political socialization and education, representation role and policy formulation, ensuring a free, fair and transparent elections, voters' registration, voter's education, monitoring and evaluation of elections, curbing voter bribery, disrespect to the rule of law by the executive and legislature, cases of hate speech among the political class and limited oversight by the legislature.

#### **Social capital and accountability**

Social capital can result in positive democratic outcomes both quantitatively and qualitatively. This can be achieved through active citizenry resulting to

active participation in democratic rights, and holding leaders to account to promote good governance. Poor social capital often leads to marginalization of minority groups, and poor information transmission that undermines democracy. Social contracts that benefit a few individuals result in low levels of patriotism in a society. Poor social accountability where the teeth and voice do not work together often results in poor governance outcomes especially on accountability aspects.

#### **Weak economic development**

Economic development is a precursor to democracy. Weak economic development acts as a barrier to democracy. When people are poor due to weak economic development, they easily accept political clientelism, which negatively affects democracy. Economic development results in more educated citizens who are aware of their democratic responsibility and their constitutional rights to actively participate in governance. Increasing unemployment rates is a sign of less citizen inclusivity in development matters. Horizontal inequality acts as a key barrier to national cohesion in Kenya.

#### **Product patriotism**

Patriotic marketing is the art of promoting products and services through campaigns that provoke a sense of pride in one's nation. Such marketing has been observed through the Buy Kenya Build Kenya campaign and the 'najivunia kuwa mkenya (I am proud to be Kenyan) campaign. However, this form of marketing has been limited to government entities, yet the private sector which is more experienced in marketing could incorporate patriotic marketing in a bid to not only sell their products but also promote national identity by championing for values of patriotism in Kenya.

#### **Justice system**

Access to justice is affected by high cost of justice, lack of knowledge on matters of rights among citizens, and limited number of courts to serve the population which compromises the value of rule of law. Ethnic exclusion results in poor sense of national identity and patriotism, and is a barrier in achieving the national values on integrity, inclusiveness, and non-discrimination.

#### **Enabling environment**

There are few studies on status of national values in Kenya. Apart from the baseline study done in 2016 on status of national values, no other study has been

done to see how effective the policy has been on driving inculcation of national values. Information is powerful in promoting values of democracy and good governance through transparency and accountability. Press freedom can act as a tool to curb corruption and promote good governance. Media has a key role to play as a watchdog in a bid to enhance accountability of the government through properly informing citizens on working of government on key governance issues.

### **Inequitable distribution of resources**

Inequality and inequitable distribution of resources in a nation often leave some individuals and communities feeling marginalized. Inequality in Kenya is evidenced by the Gini coefficient score of 0.4, which is the highest in East Africa, making Kenya the most unequal nation in East Africa, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2021 Inequality Trend and Diagnostic report. Inequitable distribution of resources always results in unbalanced regional development where some regions become more developed while others are left out of the development agenda. This results in a weak national identity among communities in undeveloped regions as they feel left out of the national cake in form of resources.

There are also delays in disbursement of funds to counties, which is associated with delays in delivery of programmes and services to the citizens. Majority of counties still experience weak collection of own source revenue (OSR). Delayed disbursement of funds and weak collection of OSR acts as one of the barriers to full implementation of devolution as a national value because of constraints in implementing planned development activities.

### **Recommendations**

The study has tried to highlight some of the underlying issues that prevent the practice of national values in the nation and suggested strategies that if implemented would help to supplement the strategies in the national policy for values, resulting in higher adherence to national values. To strengthen the value system, the following policy options are recommended.

#### **Political environment**

- (i) National and County governments could promote direct democracy through operationalization of the Public Participation Bill of 2018.

- (ii) Strengthen political parties as institutions critical in promoting adherence to national values by raising the budget for political parties from 0.3% to 1% of revenue collected.
- (iii) Amend the Political Parties Act of 2011 to require political parties to have at least 10,000 members from more than half of the counties to be eligible for registration instead of the current 1,000 members to address ethnic-based political parties that undermine democracy, good governance and inclusivity.
- (iv) Develop appropriate monitoring tools to curb on political clientelism in form of vote buying.
- (v) Build capacity of legislature on technical aspects of budget and other areas of fiscal management. This can be done through designing a training programme on budgetary and fiscal management to be done at the Kenya School of Monetary Studies for the legislature members of the Budget Committee.
- (vi) Review the rule of decision making in Parliament from a simple majority to at least 2/3 majority to ensure effective consultation between the majority and minority party before a decision is made.

#### **Social capital and accountability**

- (i) Develop a policy framework with which civil service and various oversight institutions in the government can work together to promote effective social accountability.

#### **Economic environment**

- (i) Review and ensure adherence to employment policies under the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to facilitate structured employment in the labour force. These reviews need to be done both at County and National Government as a way of achieving national cohesion.
- (ii) Encourage marketing agencies to use patriotic marketing in a bid to educate the masses on the country's national values.
- (iii) Implement the recommendations made by the NCIC ethnic and diversity auditing to enhance inclusivity in the county.
- (iv) Facilitate inter-county activities such as trade fairs and cross-cultural events to build on social capital to promote values of national unity and democracy.

## Justice system

- (i) A reduction in the cost of justice through reduced court fees, construction of more courts in devolved units and hiring of more judges to reduce case backlogs and increase education or awareness campaigns on matters of rights among Kenyans.

## Enabling environment

- (i) Amend the Leadership and Integrity Act of 2012 to exclude anyone who has been charged with violating any of the 17 National Values and Principles of Governance from taking office of elective and appointive position until his or her case is resolved.
- (ii) Conduct a primary study in national values to assess the status to see if recommendations on Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2013 being implemented yielded the desired outcome and, if not, revise the Paper No. 8 of 2013 with other strategies to promote adherence to national values in the country.

- (iii) Develop a monitoring tool to assess how the private sector and NGOs are inculcating national values in their spaces.
- (iv) Repeal the specific clauses in the MCA 2013 and KICA 2013 amendments to guarantee media freedom.
- (v) Adopt an information framework that is easily understood, actionable and arouses desire to act upon in promoting national values.

## Distribution of resources

- (i) Build capacity of counties to develop sustainable mechanisms for Own Source Revenue collection in line with specific counties' resources and capabilities.
- (ii) There is need to carry out the Public Expenditure Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment in all the 47 counties as a way of enhancing financial accountability in the counties.

### About KIPPRA Policy Briefs

KIPPRA Policy Briefs are aimed at a wide dissemination of the Institute's policy research findings. The findings are expected to stimulate discussion and also build capacity in the public policy making process in Kenya.

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