

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF GOVERNANCE IN KENYA

Towards Civic Engagement

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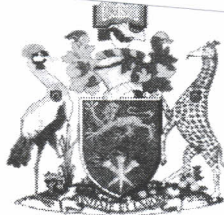
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Foreword

In theory and in the words of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is the 'government of the people, by the people and for the people.' But in practice and especially in Kenya, it can be described as the 'government of the political leaders, by the political leaders and for the political leaders'. This is because in as much as ordinary people would like be to involved in their own governance, all critical decision are made elsewhere (in boardrooms, five star hotels and beach resorts, or goat-eating parties). This includes matters as heavy as the country's constitution.

However, citizens can only participate fully and effectively when they have adequate knowledge of governance matters. Consequently, their participation is, many times, limited to voting which is also quite often subjected to high levels of manipulation. The people are never given that opportunity to choose, the language used is complicated or, they do not have access to sufficient information to appreciate the centrality of their role in self rule. Sometimes the people themselves do not think they are expected to participate.

This book, *Theory and Practice of Governance in Kenya: Towards Civic Engagement* is a landmark publication on governance in Kenya and an important tool to empower and assist citizens participate fully in the socio-economic and political affairs of their country. The book demystifies governance for lay people to understand their role in governance and how they should play it. As one of the pioneers in the provision of civic education in this country, my heart leaps with joy to see such a major contribution which will empower the citizens of this country to make informed choices on matters regarding how they should be governed. Kenyans can only redeem this country from tyranny if they read and practice what is contained in this book.

I am delighted that many Kenyans are currently familiar with words such as 'civic education', which reminds me of the countless times that the Provincial Administration and regular police under the KANU government chased us out of halls and churches for conducting civic education. Today, KANU, which is in the opposition, is demanding for civic education! Retired Justice Aaron Ringera (now heading KACC) once said that 'an informed citizenry is a joy to democrats, but a threat to dictators'. Informed citizens can make a critical and noble contribution to the welfare of their country. Kenyans must therefore realize that the destiny of this country lies in their own hands and it is time they took a strong position and reminded politicians that they are indeed their masters, not servants. However, because politics also entails taking positions, good governance thrives best where the citizenry is well informed.

This book clearly brings out some of the key areas where citizens must make their contributions in matters of governance. The book further introduces a factor that has never been taken seriously by the leadership or the citizens themselves when they are electing leaders. For instance, do we as a country have national principles, values, ideology or goals, and do we have what we consider to be national principles and core values? We have had some phrases coined by politicians and dubbed national principles, values or ideologies. But, as the authors of this book have correctly argued, we have never as a nation spelt out our core values. No wonder then that many of our so called political parties are just ethnic fiefdoms and clubs for the elites with no definite ideological road map. One critical assignment in the recommended civic engagement therefore is the need to critically analyze the existing political parties, their respective manifestos and the ideologies informing the positions taken as a first step towards attaining desirable governments.

Consequently, the absence of national core values is a sad affair. Yet, these values must first be internalized and cherished by every citizen so as to be able to demand these from leaders. Although this book seems to trace the genesis of our governance quagmire to the colonial rulers, the greater portion of the blame lies squarely with us. The colonialists may have introduced extreme forms of dictatorship, but how do we explain the dictatorship and corruption that are the hallmark of our leaders in the villages, public and religious institutions, community based groups or within Parliament and indeed the cabinet. Seemingly, the leadership we elect is what will determine the quality of governance and since democracy is a process, the authors remind us to invest in core values as a benchmark for good leadership and desirable governance.

Following each general election, I have always thought that we were moving from one phase to another. However, after a few months of each election, I come to realize that we might still be at the same stage singing the same bad song with new instruments and new choir masters. This is how transition may come without any meaningful change in governance. We need not lose hope, though. Many things have changed and some democratic gains have been made. This book enumerates some of the positive gains so far made on the governance front, but I would perhaps caution that such gains have been built on very swampy ground. The likelihood of sinking is rather high. There is no guarantee that these gains cannot be reversed. This is why such gains must be consolidated at all costs.

The book ends on a positive note which I would like to commend by adding that it is time Kenyans not only thought about reconciliation but also

reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconstitution. I still have a dream that one day Kenyans will be able to elect their leaders without being bribed or shedding blood during campaigns. I believe that Kenyans can elect good leaders without considering their ethnicity, race or religion, but on account of their competence and capability, and that Kenyans will one day contribute financially and materially to candidates instead of demanding a cent from them. This book will help us realize this dream if we practice what it holds. I recommend it as compulsory reading for all Kenyans, civic education providers, patriotic Kenyans, secondary schools and universities.

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Director

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Preface

Free and educative public debate on matters of governance is a relatively new phenomenon in Kenyan politics which can be traced to the 'second liberation' in the late 1990s. Those days of awakening saw considerable liberalisation of the air waves, the print media and the repeal of some archaic colonial laws, such as the preservation of the Public Security Act, the Public Order Act, and the Chief's Authority Act. Despite that, participation in political debate or enjoyment of the right of expression and conscience remain limited to elites, most of whom have ready access to radio, television and newspapers. The urban poor and most rural dwellers remain excluded from such debates. There is therefore need to disaggregate and repackage what constitutes core governance issues so as to enable meaningful civic engagement for a wider cross-section of the Kenyan people.

It is against this background that this civic engagement and governance training manual was conceived and prepared. The manual is as a result of systematic research, detailed discussions and open interviews with various interest groups and members of the public. Its main aim is to enable Kenyans to influence governance in the direction of peaceful political change and transition, promote the inclusion of minorities and excluded groups in resource allocation, and engage citizens in economic development. The ultimate goal is to bring out the crucial linkages between governance and development through public dialogue and political analysis. The purpose is to enable the general public in Kenya, and Africa in general, to debate issues central to governance with the hope that national values and people's hopes and aspirations will come to inform and consolidate political party politics and the national development agenda.

In all, twelve themes central to governance in Kenya and Africa in general are covered. A clear understanding of them will engender a more useful civic engagement process for Kenyans.

Part One looks at the theory of governance from the perspective of core values, the role of political ideology, political party politics, the importance of party manifestos, ingredients of good governance and the attributes of good leadership. The underlying argument is that good governance should emanate from and be guided by national core values. In other words, in the absence of these core values, a country quickly loses a rallying point and governance becomes difficult to administer and regulate.

Part Two looks at the practice of governance from the Kenyan perspective. Issues covered include coalition politics, transition and change, resource

allocation, and modes of social, economic and political inclusion and exclusion. It aims at demonstrating the extent to which Kenya and other countries in Africa have maintained a semblance of good governance. It is noted that change in itself is not a sufficient condition to achieving the ideals of good governance. Although Kenya has witnessed several changes in its political leadership, a desired shift and hence transition in governance has not been achieved.

Part Three looks at what could sustain good governance. Communication, conflict management, hope, reconciliation, and peace building are identified as some of the ways through which good governance could be nurtured.

Each of the twelve chapters ends with a set of questions aimed at generating discussions and stimulating guided debate around issues of democratic governance.

This book is aimed therefore at providing a snapshot for quick reading and easier understanding for meaningful civic involvement and engagement. Target audiences include academics; the mass media; state representatives; members of Parliament; political party leadership; civil society groups; disadvantaged/minority groups; community level gatekeepers; and the general public.

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