

InfoBrief

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**We face a catastrophic crisis
of leadership:
*Youth must provide change***

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1. Summary

Over the years, Kenya's youthful population and those clamouring for their plight have complained of marginalization and sought affirmative action from the state as a panacea to the many crises facing youth in the country. Ironically, the youth constitute the single largest voting block that can influence the outcome of elections that are held regularly in the country.

Kenyans have been socialised in politics through ethnicity with a very predictable voting pattern. What does the future hold for the country in the wake of the unprecedented growth in technology and a country increasingly incapable of meeting demands of its youthful population?

Can the huge number of the youth offer a beacon of hope for the turn the future elections will take by giving a new narrative of political mobilization (Issue Based Mobilization) as opposed to ethnicity?

2. Introduction

Leadership in Kenya, like in most of the other African states is not satisfactory to a huge number of electorates. In 1992, the country opened up to politics of pluralism allowing elections after every five years. Since then, the country has held six general elections. Although the outcome of this elections have been accepted by electorates and observers save for the 2007 one that led to the post-elections violence, they have left a significantly huge portion of the population dissatisfied and a country divided in the middle.

Many factors have influenced this outcome. Political dynasties, huge amount of money used in the campaigns, voter bribery, corruption, voter intimidation, use of state resources, rigging and many other factors. This has to a great extent denied the country an opportunity to elect visionary leaders who would have managed the state affairs differently.





The immense resources required to participate in the election and an economy that has not been able to provide opportunities to absorb the youth in the economy have conspired to deny youth ability to meaningfully participate in the elections despite their huge number.

However, the past two elections offer hopes for a change of tide in future. Although not at the level one would consider desirable, a high number of young people were elected in all the elective positions in the country. For instance, the country has the most youthful Senate in Africa.

Young people, the least ethicised voting constituent in the country must now be mobilised in politics and encouraged to participate in future elections both by voting and offering their candidature for various elective positions. They can leverage on the role the technology is playing in our daily lives to achieve these goals. This way, they will find their way to the decision making platforms, where they will be able to influence policy that addresses their plight

3. How to address youth leadership

(i) Building Next Generation of Leadership

Kenya is undeniably in a leadership crisis. This therefore creates the need for mentorship programmes for the Kenyan youth. The civil society, including the church, which once played a significant role in the country's governance, donor community have an important role to nurture future leaders.

This calls for deliberate efforts by various actors, including the state, to allocate more financial and human resources to this noble cause.

A number of organisations, which must be encouraged to carry on, including Youth Congress, have already started initiatives to prepare the next generation of leaders through mentorship for leadership. For instance, Youth Congress has started a programme targeting young people in the age bracket of 15-30 years. Spread across the 47 counties, the programme will prepare 5000 trainers from all walks of life.



With the ongoing reforms in the education sector, the government must also take keen interest and incorporate mentorship and leadership in school's curriculum. The single most important task for Kenya is to prepare the next generation of leadership that will take the country to greater heights.

(ii) Youth ought to take up their leadership role

Over 50 years since Kenya gained independence, the country is still facing the three enemies that were identified then namely ignorance, poverty and disease. This is largely attributed to poor governance and lack of strong institutions. Resources are not equitably distributed with a paltry 20 per cent controlling the country's total wealth. This has to do with the policies the successive governments have adopted to guide our growth. And as they say, good policies come from effective leaders.

Although good manifestos are drafted by various actors every time the election draws near, they

are not implemented by their proponents once they ascend to power. A time has now come when politics should be defined differently.

Youth have the potential to change the prevailing narrative, where the biggest electorate vote on ethnic as opposed to issue based politics. This will only happen if young people look within themselves and their communities, identify action plans and draw up a strategy on what they need to do and what they need to achieve their goals. They should come together and start participating in governance based on issues such as clamour for accountable leadership and which must be consistent to have positive impact.

Election Youth in 2017

Position	Youth	As % of Total
Governor	1	2%
Senate	5	11%
National Assembly	23	8%
Women Representative	5	6%
County Assembly	340	23%

Another important thing is the need to change mindset by redefining success in the Kenyan context. The culture of handouts and theft of public resources must be put to an end. Youth must create platforms and nurture leadership to ensure their huge number propels more of them into elective positions.

(iii) Youth leadership is more than just age

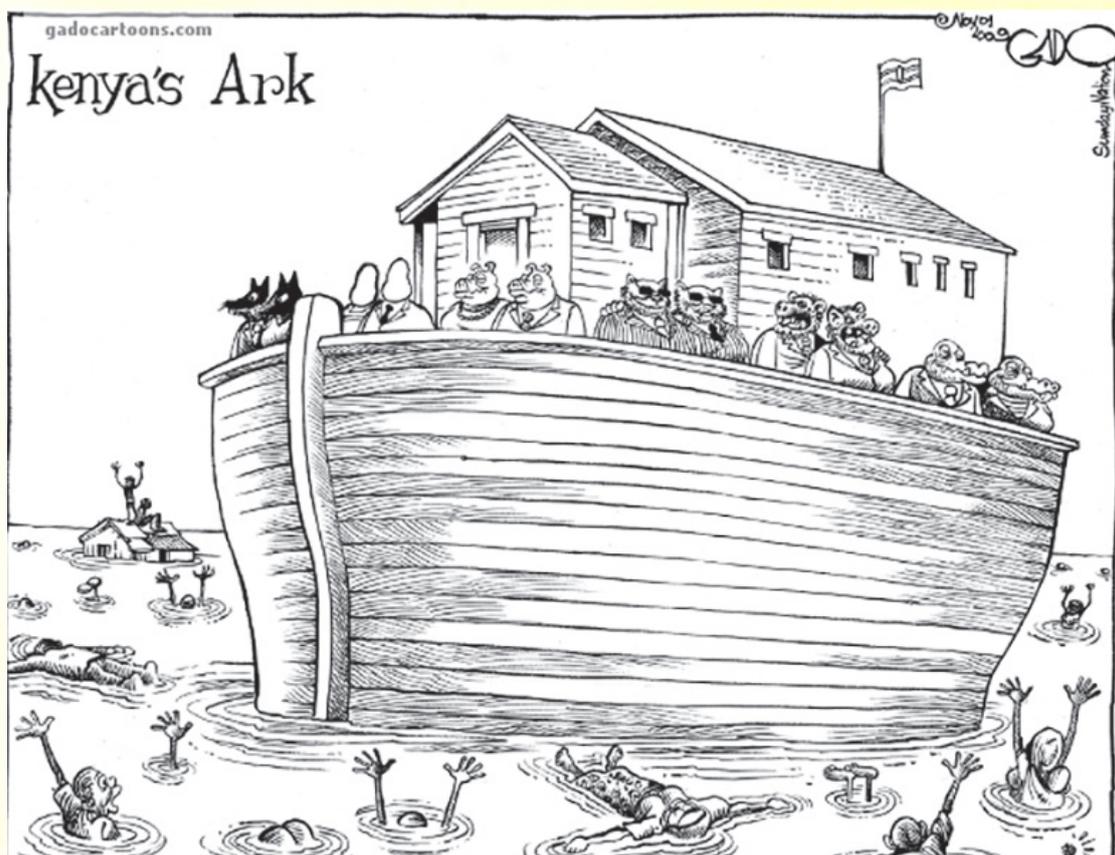
Being young is not a silver bullet. It should bring into leadership fresh ideas and innovations free of corruption, negative ethnicity and cronyism that have held back their old counterparts who have held power for many years.

What Kenya need are leaders with bold vision and unwavering commitment to service. It is sad that some of the Kenya's youthful leaders that have been elected in parliament have become sycophants rather than playing a meaningful and progressive role to tackle the problems affecting youth and Kenyans in general.

Studies have revealed that some of the youthful leaders are performing poorly in service delivery and have fallen into the tribal cocoons that have defined Kenya's politics. Young leaders must be challenged to rise to the occasion and deliver to the expectation of Kenyans.

Once in politics, the new leadership must avoid the culture of "get-rich-quick" and "it's our turn to eat". A recent and worrying survey, which is to be condemned, showed that 50 per cent of Kenyan youth admire those who have acquired wealth through dubious means. Leaders who can demonstrate that politics and integrity can go hand in hand is what the country needs.

Finally, young leaders must value and believe in competence and not cronyism — people rise to public office based on merit and not as a reward for friendship or political loyalty. Focusing on competence will encourage young people to appreciate hard work and not connections. It is imperative that youth demonstrate that they are different and effective and that they have what it takes to address some of the serious challenges facing the country.



(iv) Youthful politicians can build the Kenya that they want

The election of many young leaders in all the elective positions in Kenya is one of the untold success stories of the August 8 general election. These young leaders carry with them the Kenyan dream. Many people are optimistic that most of youthful leaders are coming in both the county and national assemblies for the first time and will bring change.

As they sat in parliament during orientation, their faces beamed with hope, determination and to some, resilience. Some, despite huge financial challenges, had run grueling campaigns to floor experienced and seasoned politicians with immense resources.

These young leaders rose into power because they carried with them the people's dreams.

The confidence and determination in their faces gave a lot of hope to many Kenyans that

we can build the Kenya we want. The just-elected young leaders are the new wineskins in parliament who must be ready to confront greedy politicians who survived the August 8 general election onslaught.

A culture of sycophancy, which has characterized politics in the recent past, where members of assemblies are whipped to take certain unpopular party positions, should not derail these young leaders, although they do not have enough numbers to turn the table. They can lay a strong foundation by focusing on a legislative agenda that can meaningfully empower young people.

Their legislative work is well cut out for them. Problems facing youth include corruption, youth unemployment, lack of quality education, lack of support for the youth business and entrepreneurship, healthcare, housing and youth-friendly socio-economic policies.





Being the most youthful country in Africa with over 75 per cent of the population aged 35 years and below, Kenya has the most productive workforce.

(v) Youth need to shape Kenya's party politics

Parties in Kenya are electoral vehicles to power. Every time an election draws near, there are a lot of parties' rea-alignments. Although negotiating broad coalitions and electoral deals that could change voting patterns is healthy for a country like Kenya, things have not taken a positive direction, especially for the youth.

The Constitution lays a foundation for building strong issue-based political parties. However, the crisis in political parties, which are characterized by exclusion, patronage and ethnicity, has undermined the growth of democracy in Kenya. We do not have parties that can discuss serious policy options.

They do not set their sights on long-term strategies and growth. Therefore, parties lack internal democracy, strong structures, discipline, and critical ideologies that can define the country's development agenda.

Without an ideology, it is difficult to define how politics can accommodate various players, especially the youth, a critical constituent. Parties in Kenya are known to craft manifestoes but they have done little to include youth into leadership.

Lack of hope in future is the cause of rage among the youth. Therefore, active and meaningful participation of the youth in party politics is critical for the development of democracy in Kenya.

More importantly, Kenyans should continue to demand that political parties become accountable, free of ethnic chauvinism, corruption and patronage. Advanced democracies seek political support through development agendas.

(vi) Youth need to end political apathy

As a country, Kenya will have only itself to blame if tough questions about the role of the youth in national development is not asked. It is regrettable that Kenyan youths complain about issues that affect them yet squander opportunities to influence the election of people who share their aspirations.

Over the years, the political class has used young people to add to their vote numbers. This only leaves the youth crying over empty promises about employment creation, reduced cost of living and a good business environment.



Political apathy among the youth has lately been witnessed in electoral process. As a result, youth are not able to make use of their huge numbers at the ballot box to shape politics and socio-economic decisions.

They are instead used as the “swing vote” by politicians. To the political class, the youth seem to exist only as voting banks.

Having young people in Parliament is not a need, but rather, leaders who have a bold vision for the youth and this country. The participation of the youth in elections is critical to the future of the country.

Time for youth to take up the baton

There is something that we all can do, to try to make leadership better – to determine the nation’s destiny. The young generation can change this country for the better. The youth must provide visionary leadership, and use their power to get leaders to do the right thing.

About The Youth Congress

The Youth Congress (TYC) is a youth serving Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) providing young people in Kenya with a platform to articulate their issues, explore opportunities for youth participation and leadership to effectively address their interests and concerns and engage young people in social, economic and political development. The organization has four main programmes:

1. Research, Policy and Advocacy

The programme aims to realise meaningful participation of youth in policy-making and implementation. Its expected outputs are: improved knowledge on existing policies and their effect on the youth; one stop information centre on the state of the youth in Kenya; coordinated advocacy initiatives on youth issues; and increased youth participation in policy making and advocacy.

2. Youth and Leadership

The programme aims to realise meaningful youth participation in leadership and governance processes, and to build next generation of youth leaders with vision and values. Its expected outputs are: youth in leadership positions and processes; increased awareness and capacity of youth to engage in leadership and governance processes; and youth actively promoting ethical leadership.

3. Youth Entrepreneurship, Talent and Innovation

The programme aims to realise an empowered youth population benefiting from available opportunities and utilizing their skills and talents for economic development. Its expected outputs are: young people equipped with entrepreneurial skills; young people linked to financial opportunities and markets; talent realization and utilization by the youth; and partnerships and alliances built to advance youth economic development.

4. Institutional Development

The programme aims to realise an effectively governed and managed organization with adequate resources to deliver its programmes. Its expected outputs are: adequate resources for smooth and effective implementation of activities; a staff complement that is competent, passionate, determined and responsive to youth values and agenda; functional partnerships and networks; and inclusive, participatory and gender responsive programmes, policies and strategies.

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