



Info Brief

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Youth & Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)

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1 Introduction

Building Bridges Initiative was launched on November 2019 aimed at finding solutions to the nature of Kenya's politics. This came about after the Handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Opposition leader Raila Odinga. President Kenyatta formed the Taskforce on Building Bridges to Unity Advisory with a mandate that it consult citizens, leaders, institutions, civil society, the private sector, the religious sector, and other stakeholders to recommend to him solutions that he will share with relevant institutions and processes. Though there are other important challenges, the Taskforce focused specially on nine major ones as per its mandate.



2 Building Bridges Initiatives thematic areas

- i. National Ethos
- ii. Responsibilities and Rights
- iii. Ethnic antagonism
- iv. Divisive elections
- v. Inclusivity
- vi. Shared prosperity
- vii. Devolution
- viii. Corruption
- ix. Safety and security
- x. Commissions and cross cutting issues

3 Questions on Youth in the BBI

There are some fundamental questions to be asked about youth in the BBI report. First, what are the youth issues in the BBI report? Second How has the BBI addressed youth issues – key among them unemployment and exclusion. Across the country, youth are concerned about unemployment and exclusion. Third, what is the Kenya that youth want? Finally, what are the recommendations of BBI and how are they relevant to the youth?

4 Analysis and Perspective

i. National Ethos

The Kenyan state is in the last stages of shedding resemblance to its colonial progenitor. Today, we have a country whose borders and citizenship are interlinked with the world in a much broad sense. Our identity as a country on the other hand is not just about some 'list of cultural characteristics'. Rather, the new idea of 'Kenyaness' is captured in Article 1 of the Constitution of Kenya that has empathized the residual authority of the people. The young generation of Kenyans is giving the country a new character and models of relationships as the people.

To build or rebuild the desired Kenya's character and a new Kenya, BBI must recommend robust mechanism including full and proper implementation of chapter 6 of the constitution on leadership and integrity.

iii. Ethnic antagonism:

Youth scenarios generate a complex politics of identity among the youth that ranges from those underpinned by new forms of cultural/artistic creation and representation to those driven by violence and/or crime. There are also those informed by movement-based on political system that speak the language of inclusion and representation or which entail an immersion in new virtual/transnational communities and networks. A national consciousness has now emerged through which the politics of youth identity is likely to replace that of ethnic identity. In any case, it is no longer uncommon to hear political conversations being pursued on the basis of generational change. Mechanisms should be put in place for cultural exchange and integration.

ii. Responsibilities and rights:

Article 55 of the Constitution obliges the state to take appropriate measures to ensure socio-economic and political development of youth through education, training and employment. National government addresses youth employment, inclusion among other concerns through policies and programmes, but it lacks an overarching strategic, youth policy. There is dire need for enabling laws, policies and framework to ensure that government achieves and meets the objectives of article 55. It is vital to ensure full and proper implementation of the Kenya Development Youth Policy. Mechanism should be put in place to ensure that youth contribute to their development and that of the country.

iv. Divisive elections

Although the country is facing a number of problems that deserve neutral intervention and debate, there is no hope of immediate resolution since there is no voice of reason to guide the process. Left to themselves, politicians will always be intolerant and suspicious of one another, and fears of polarising the country remain real. Since Mr Mwai Kibaki's administration took power, civil society, which had played a significant role in opening up democratic space and was seen as a legitimate institution, lost its steam and strategy.

The government has been accused of excesses seen as leading the country to drift away from the gains it had made. Although civil society has sometimes opposed the government's perceived repression by protesting in the streets, this has been seen in a political light, as taking sides in the political divide.

v. Inclusivity

Election of youthful leaders mean nothing if youth leaders do not provide fresh leadership free of corruption, negative ethnicity, and cronyism that seems to have held our society and more so the body politic hostage. The youth have the potential of changing the future of Kenya and can help the country to preserve and advance full potential of the country and indeed the world. Across the country, leaders are getting younger, especially with the advent of the 2010 CoK. Kenya's Senate is ranked as the most youthful in Africa for having the highest number of young senators. However, the value of youth lies not only in their age, but also in their vision, creativity, and values.

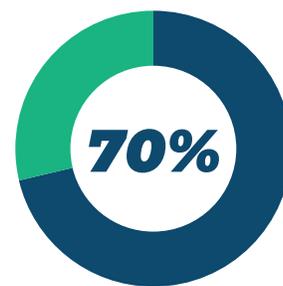
Realizing that the political parties are the most entrenched avenues and mechanisms for pursuance and realization of political power, there is need to design a system that facilitates meaningful youth participation in political parties. Youth have largely been marginalised, excluded from decision-making in political parties, and denied the chance to determine their own destiny. We believe that if such youth were to engage and invent space in political parties from the background of their self-organizing, there could be much more active and meaningful participation. Such deepened participation of citizens, especially the youth, in politics is critical for the development of democracy in Kenya.

Also, there are steps Kenya should consider to increase the country's resilience as a society especially during election time. First, the country must acknowledge that there's a connection between the money being spent and the influence of special interests on the political process. Secondly, it's critical to distinguish between the money necessary for a candidate's voice to be heard, and that being used to corrupt the political process. If money must be raised for campaigns in a transparent way, then regulations and laws governing campaign financing are crucial. Third, the issue is not necessarily the sheer amount being spent. The problem is a political system in which the overwhelming majority of political contributions come from a tiny number of individuals. Kenya must shift from this model of financing because it turns politics into a high-stakes game that very often turns violent.

Beyond deepening democracy, the participation of youth in political competition and party politics has potential to re-organise our body politic to issue based focus. It is undeniable that the CoK has established a foundation for building strong issue-based political parties. However, the crisis in political parties, which are characterised by exclusion, patronage, and ethnicity, remains, threatening to undermine the growth of democracy. Lamentably, out of 14 million registered party members in Kenya, only 27 per cent are youth. Clearly, participation of youth in political parties is below average, given their high population. That is why urgent action is needed to ensure that youth engage in politics.



Of Kenyan population is below 35 years of age



Of jobless people in Kenya are youth

vi. Shared prosperity

Although some mechanisms are in place for coordination of youth interventions in the country, there is need for meaningful collaboration and engagement among the stakeholders, mainstreaming the youth affairs in all the sectors of the economy.

This has been a strong missing link, which has negatively affected the programs the government has put in place to empower youth. BBI Report needs to have a strong recommendation on the need to bring the youth on board in all programs to meet national goals. Without youth-centred planning, budgeting and development, and without youth contribution, it will be a formidable challenge for Kenya to realise the nation's development goals. Mainstreaming youth agenda is a key step towards ensuring integration, equity and inclusion of youth in the national governance and economic development.

Despite this tremendous growth story in Kenya, poverty levels still remain high and affect about 45 per cent of the region's households. Inequality in access to education, health services, and jobs has remained a night-

mare to the continent, most of whose countries have an average economic growth rate of five per cent.

Although the continent has, in recent years successfully sought integration on a number of issues, with infrastructure leading the pack, very little has been achieved in improving the social wellbeing of its population.

Eighty per cent of the country's residents are young people aged less than 35 years. However, seven out of 10 jobless people in the continent fall in this category. The challenge confronting Kenya is inequality and exclusion. The much-touted economic growth that is being witnessed in Africa today is not sustainable unless governments promote inclusiveness in all sectors.

Kenya's governments must ensure that the benefits of growth reach more people, especially the poorest, thereby aiding poverty reduction. It is naïve to ignore mounting evidence that inequality is a threat to economic growth in the continent. There is a need for a joint strategy and policy changes to target integration of all citizens in the growth of the country.

vii. Devolution

There is need for the devolved units to identify and prioritise youth affairs as a main agenda not to be tackled in other broad areas such as social services, sports, and gender as has been the case. In addition, counties should increase the funds allocated to youth affairs in general to reflect the prevalence of joblessness among youth in the counties. At least 10 percent of the county budget should go towards support for youth employment initiative.

Equally important, counties should develop innovative ways of supporting youth entrepreneurship and self-employment. If policymakers can harness the entrepreneurial ideas of young people in the country, they will be doing a service not just for the youth population, but for Kenya at large.

With the reviewed National Youth Policy approved, counties must put in place the necessary structures and finances for its adoption and development of county youth policies.

Competent youth should be appointed to leadership and decision-making positions in the counties. This would send a clarion call to the youth, that they have a stake in the county, and they must be involved in building the devolved unit.

Counties should put in place a peer review mechanism that will help counties to tackle governance and development problems including youth unemployment. This will help counties to learn from each other and address common challenges.

viii. Corruption

Although the country has created numerous institutions, with the enactment of the 2010 constitution, to deal with corruption, The Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index has ranked us poorly in successive years.

An economy that does not offer sufficient ways to tap potential of its youthful population, forcing them to consider short cuts that have worked for their colleague's prosperity.

Every year according to World Bank corruption denies some 250,000 Kenyan youth a job opportunity

BBI need to make strong recommendations on how to address conflict of interest, enhance citizens involvement in the fight against corruption, a strong judiciary and on the implementation of chapter 6 of the constitution.

ix. Safety and Security

Although accountability of various institutions and individuals is an issue that has been brought to fore since the country embarked on the prolonged electioneering period, the manner in which the National Police Service employed excessive force to quell protests that turned riotous is chilling.

The aftermath of the 2007 presidential election presented an opportunity to reform the police force. The Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence recommended extensive reforms of the police system. The taskforce came up with more than 200 recommendations and although some were embraced, the process lost steam at some point. This report can still today provide the roadmap needed to change the conduct of police.

Initial reforms included training, restructuring of the force and vetting. The vetting of officers by the National Police Service Commission (NPSC), a process that was mooted as central in the police reform agenda, must be done in a more transparent manner than has happened. BBI must put in place measures to fast-track police reforms.

x. Commissions and cross cutting

Integrating youth affairs in various ministries has not worked out well in Kenya. The challenges facing the youth, the most productive constituency, justify the creation of an independent ministry, even as the Jubilee government implements its four pillars for growth.

Youth empowerment and development are important. They require time, resources and good strategy, and should not be lumped together with other government responsibilities.

For instance, we have grappled for decades with youth unemployment, yet a well-thought-out strategy to identify solutions has never been crafted. It is now time to think of a Ministry of Youth Affairs to develop appropriate strategies, policies and programmes for young people.

“Youth are not only a significantly large demographic in Kenya, they are the country's greatest asset”

Youth in the BBI

The Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) gives youth a chance, not the certainty, but chance and opportunity to shape their destiny and that is why young people must engage in the process. The report by the BBI's Taskforce proposes many changes that could uplift the youth from the marginalized state.

BBI even with all the contentions provides an opportunity to deal with socio-economic and political inequalities, and problems that continue to weigh heavily on the youth. It puts the youth at the top of the agenda and hugely important constituency.

The taskforce report points out youth exclusion as one of the notable issues that Kenyans must deal with. It notes the concerns of young people and that they feel that their needs and aspirations are not being met by the economic, social and cultural structures in place today. The report calls for radical measures to change the dynamics and structures that have led to the sorry state – and failure to do so puts Kenya at risk.

Chapter 2 recommends the desperate need for national ethos - shared beliefs, ideals and aspirations, to guide and constrict the planning and actions of the State to the benefit of the people of Kenya. It calls for a vision for Kenya, a new idea of 'Kenyaness' and sustained bottom-up and top-down civic, cultural and social initiatives that, at minimum, transform Kenyans and particularly the young, into individuals with respect for others and readiness to serve and assist others and a readiness to serve and assist others.

Chapter 3 calls for recognition of the inalienable rights of Kenyans including the youth as articulated in the Bill of Rights section of the 2010 Constitution. Equally important, the report calls for the strengthening of citizen's embrace of both rights and responsibilities.

Chapter 6 calls for an end to marginalization and exclusion, and the need for the responsiveness by decision-makers in the Government to the interests of social and ethnic groups and the needs and concerns of distinct constituencies such as young people. It recommend the need reforms to fulfill Kenyans yearning for inclusivity on a political, economic, social, religious, cultural, age, and gender basis.





Youth should support BBI only if it captures and fully recognize their interest

Chapter 7 points out the urgent need for shared prosperity – an economic revolution that can produce the employment and income opportunities that can come close to the expectations of young Kenyans. It notes that the single most important matter facing Kenyans when it comes to shared prosperity is generating enough jobs and employment, particularly for young people. That is why the recommendation for government to ensure integration, equity and inclusion of youth in development is very important.

It must not be lost to us that the present governance system continues to perpetuate inequality, exclusion and marginalization of youth. As such youth must take part in the current debate, respect everyone's democratic right, identify and assert their position and use the opportunity to shape a new Kenya – a better country for all.

Young people must realize that they are not only a significantly large demographic in Kenya, they are the country's greatest asset. They represent dynamism, talent and energy that the country needs to make real progress. It should go without saying that the youth are Kenya—and we cannot leave Kenya behind.

Youth must shun violence in all its forms and refuse to be used as pawns. Instead, youth must provide responsible leadership and affirm their aspiration for a better, more inclusive and democratic Kenya.

History suggests that bad leaders and systems are supported by citizens and voters who stand aside and watch. Youth must not be indifferent, cynical and observers in processes that shape their future. Youth have the power to change things, to get Kenya out of its current funk, to make sure we seize a brighter future. The consequences of sitting on the sidelines are more dire.



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.

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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