



Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and BBI Taskforce Chairman Yusuf Haji together with Governors Mwangi Wa Iria of Muranga, Kiraitu Murungi of Meru, Francis Kimemia (Nyandarua), Anne Waiguru (Kirinyaga) in a rally in Meru on February 29, 2020.

## MANAGING DIVERSITY: MOUNT KENYA'S NEW STRATEGY FOR UNITY

PETER KAGWANJA

*The Building Bridges to Unity Initiative (BBI) has produced a blueprint that shifts the axis of politics from a short-term view to a long view; not only in the 'GEMA' region, but the entire country at large. It is in this context that Mt Kenya's new strategy is the twin ideas of the management of diversity and a rule-based, just and inclusive society to underpin sustainable development.*

Certainly, after the August 9, 2022 the Mount Kenya region has produced three of the four Kenyan presidents since independence in 1963 will not be at the helm of power.

Prior to the March 9, 2018 "handshake" between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Opposition Chief Raila Odinga, it was almost certain that his Deputy, William Ruto, and the Jubilee Party would succeed

him. But the Kenyatta-Odinga peace deal changed all this.

In the ensuing jostling for power, the region's elite was divided between the "Tangatanga" squad aligned to Mr. Ruto in the jostling for Kenyatta succession and their Kieleweke critics.

It is in this context that on November 3, 2019, this column warned that: "Without a clear strategy, Mt Kenya's political future is bleak" (SN 3/11/2019).

But the leaders' caucus from Mt Kenya region that President Uhuru Kenyatta convened at the Sagana State Lodge in Nyeri on November 15, 2019 is beginning to bear visible fruits.

An intense political process around the Building Bridges to Unity Initiative (BBI) has produced a blueprint that shifts the axis of politics from the short-term view of the politics of Kenyatta succession to a long view of the region and the Kenyan nation beyond 2022.

Undergirding the GEMA nation's new strategy are the twin ideas of the management of diversity and a rule-based, just and inclusive society to underpin sustainable development.

This strategy reveals three salient contours of the regional thinking. First, the GEMA nation envisions a just society anchored on social-economic Justice. Here, no Kenyan is treated as a foreigner in any part of the country and the right to property is respected. It welcomes other Kenyans to invest in the region, comprising of ten (11) counties, with a market of 10.7 people and contributing more than 28% of Kenya's GDP, and now organized itself around the Central Economic Bloc (CEREB).

The region is seeking to entrench devolution as a proven model of grassroots development and an anti-dote to a possible future dictator. The Kinoru blueprint calls for the devolution of no less than 45% of the national revenue to the counties and

the creation of Ward Development Fund to deepen grassroots development.

The Kinoru blueprint envisages an "agricultural revolution". It calls for at least 15% of the National and County budgets to be allocated to agriculture in line with the Maputo Declaration 2003 which recommends that at least 10% of the budget ought to go to agriculture. Current Kenya allocates less than 4% of the national budget to its producers.

It seeking to turn the country's youth bulge into a blessing. It calls for at least 35% of the County Ward Fund to be ring-fenced for the youth and a 7 year-tax holiday for youth entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the Gema nation calls for new social contract based on equitable allocation of resources based on the principle of "One Person, One Vote, One Shilling". Further, the Equalization Fund should include all historically marginalized and those being progressively marginalized by extreme poverty in urban slums and rural areas.

To avoid waste and focus on development, it calls for at least 70 percent of national resources to go to development while 30 percent is dedicated to recurrent expenditure at all levels of government.

The GEMA nation's document calls for the equality of the vote based on One Person, One Vote as the foundation of sustainable democracy.

Second, the GEMA nation is pivoting towards a more determined and careful management of diversity as the surest guarantee for a secure development after 2022. Thus, the post-Kinoru strategy is a bold experiment in managing diversity (ethnic, gender, religion, age and disability) to ensure unity and inclusion in a rule-based nation.

The Kinoru declaration calls an inclusive executive with five key positions. One is an Executive President elected by the people through universal suffrage—50% plus 1 of the Presidential votes and

at least 25% of the votes cast in each of more than 24 Counties, as the Head of State and Government, Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Forces as the central symbol of National Unity. Second is a Deputy President as a running mate, as the principal assistant of the President, elected as member of the Senate, a member of cabinet the Leader of Government Business in the Senate.

Third is a re-established Prime Minister as the Head of Government, appointed by the President from the party or coalition of parties with the majority of members in the National Assembly a member of the National Assembly, Official leader of Government Business in Parliament, and who chair meetings of Cabinet sub-committees.

Four, a Deputy Prime Minister elected from the National Assembly as the Deputy Majority Leader to the Premier. Five, a Deputy Prime minister elected from the membership of Senate, in the cabinet and as the Deputy Majority Leader to the Deputy President and deputy Leader of Government Business.

None of the President, Deputy President, Prime Minister, Speakers of the two Houses or Deputy Prime Ministers should hail from the same county or same ethnic community or group, to foster inclusivity.

The GEMA blueprint seeks to end the prevailing paralysis in the government linked to Baron de Montesquieu's doctrine of separation of powers. To this end, the declaration proposes a National Executive Council (largely modelled on the Narc Summit in 2002-2007) to be chaired by the President and consisting of the Deputy President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, Speakers of the two Houses of Parliament and the Chief Justice.

It proposes a lean and efficient Cabinet of no fewer than 15 and no more than 22 Cabinet Ministers, two-thirds drawn from the National Assembly and the Senate and the rest nominated from the ranks of professionals and special skills.

The Kinoru declaration proposes the introduction of the Leader of Official Opposition, as a member of Parliament who appoints a Shadow Cabinet to check on the National Executive.

Finally, the document envisages a nation based on strong ethos, zero tolerance to corruption and where corruption cases are concluded within 6 months.

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