



On December 13th 2019, the conference on “China-Africa energy cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative presented an opportunity to forge durable partnerships that can stimulate investments, transfer of knowledge, skills and technology required to promote access to renewable energy in Africa.

EMPOWER CITIZENS, ‘IDIOTS’ AND ‘TRIBALISTS’ CANNOT DRIVE DEVELOPMENT

PETER KAGWANJA

The Government-as-threat-to-economy thesis by Ruto’s most vocal voices in the Mount Kenya region is about power in 2022, and not a genuine emancipation of the citizens. Undoubtedly, the trouble with Kenya’s development is that it is everywhere under the sway and attack from idiots and tribalists who have either silenced the citizens or reduced them to cheering crowds. This debacle reveals that the road to 2022 will be marked by wars of Charlatans, defined in politics as a public figure who acts in a disreputable, unethical, rogue-like or unscrupulous way to influence the direction of politics.

The economy remains the main plank of Deputy President William Samoei Ruto’s pivot to Mount Kenya in a scotched earth strategy to win the

Presidency in 2022. “The biggest existential [sic] threat to Kenya’s declining economy and democracy...is Uhuru Kenyatta,” goes a roadside

by Ruto's most vocal minion in the region's politics, Kandara MP, Alice Wahome. Undoubtedly, this is so far the boldest, most radicalized, systematic and scathing attack by the Ruto camp on President Uhuru Kenyatta. Ideologically, it rests on the false premise that development is the sole responsibility of governments and Santa Clauses. But the broadside also raises fundamental questions on the moral disposition, intellectual and professional capacity of segments of the current crop of Mount Kenya leaders to conceive and implement a redemptive vision of development.

Conceptually, the Government-as-threat-to-economy thesis brings to mind the founders of democracy in Ancient Greece who identified three types of people in leadership and society which are relevant to understanding the ownership and stewardship of development: The Idiots, the Tribalists, and the Citizens. To the Greeks, "idiots" are not the mentally deficient, but the self-centered and selfish and members of society devoid of any vision of the larger society. As no more than upgraded barbarians, idiots cannot be trusted with the economy, and rightly belong to the zoo.

Similarly, the "Tribalists" in no way refer to those belonging to a specific tribe or nationality but to the distinctly tribal mentality, narrow-mindedness, allegiance to parochial affiliations, and incurable suspicion and intolerance of others. Because of their preference for intimidation, force and violence to deal with others, the Tribalists are an anti-peace, divisive, disrespectful and resentful lot. It is to this group of highly corrupt, get-rich-quickly Machiavellian rogues that former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi referred when she said: "People tend to forget their duties but remember their rights". They are the real existential enemies of development—who belong to the madhouse.

Finally, the Greeks venerated the Citizens as the ideal or perfect class of people who are well-

equipped with knowledge and skills to live a respectable life in the realm of the public, and who recognize that these rights and freedom comes with responsibilities to the larger nation and the country. They make and belong to a civilized society.

The trouble with Kenya's development is that it is everywhere under the sway and attack from idiots and tribalists who have either silenced the citizens or reduced them to cheering crowds.

The Government-as-economic-threat idiom is about power in 2022, not the genuine emancipation of the citizens. Three events set the larger context for this rhetorical blame-game on development. First is a social media war on the eve of the burial of the pro-democracy icon, Charles Rubia in Murang'a County on December 30, 2019. The cyber war started with a post carrying an unsightly image of the "status of toilets in Kariguini primary school in Kandara Constituency, represented by Alice Wahome." Wahome responded with a controversial 'Wajinga' tweet, which landed her in trouble and thrust to the fore the failure of Africa's emergent elite to steer community development.

Second are the domino and double-barreled impacts of the handshake between Kenyatta and Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and the Building Bridges Initiative Report on the 2022 succession politics. But the lightning rod came from a media interview by the former Jubilee Party Vice-Chairperson David Murathe, who stated that Uhuru will remain in power after 2022 poll.

The gist of Murathe's person opinion was two-fold: once the new political dispensation envisaged in the BBI report comes into force, nothing will stop the President, as the leader of Jubilee, to vie for any post and head the government as the Executive Prime Minister as long as wins the majority. "The only thing the President can't do is to run for Presidency", he said.

Party leadership and a broad-based national coalition will potentially ensure that Kenyatta does not disappear into political oblivion but remain as a political kingpin at the Mount Kenya region and national levels after the 2022 polls. With this, Murathe had sounded the death knell for the governing Kalenjin-Kikuyu détente, spelt doom for Ruto's ambition as heir to Kenyatta in the Mount Kenya region and potentially end political tourism in Mount Kenya politics.

Expectedly, Wahome, as the vocal voice of Ruto's Mount Kenya brigade, came from Rubia's burial guns brazing. Kenyatta should retire and go home upon the expiry of his term, she said, alleging that the President and Odinga were planning to use BBI to change the Constitution and cling on to power after 2022.

This debacle reveals that the road to 2022 will be marked by wars of Charlatans, defined in politics as a public figure who acts in a disreputable, unethical, rogue-like or unscrupulous way to influence the direction of politics. So far, Wahome has brought charlatan politics within the Jubilee party to a whole new level.

In history, such celebrated Charlatans as Rasputin (or Mad Monk) of the Romanov dynasty in Russia or more recently Julius Malema in Jacob Zuma ANC have changed the tide of politics and fortunes in favor of their masters.

Miguna Miguna, once a loyal charlatan for Odinga and now a self-proclaimed General of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and his fiercest critic, seems to be finding a new home in the radicalized wing of the Ruto camp. Besides welcoming Wahome to "the Revolutionary camp", the language she used has the uncanny finger marks of Miguna's post-2017 revolutionary rhetoric, raising questions as to whether the Kenyan-Canadian lawyer is the new spinner-at-large for the Ruto camp.

Beyond Charlatanism, the gospel of dependency on the Government and handouts by political Santa Clauses cannot develop communities. The future of development rests with an empowered citizen.

Professor Peter Kagwanja is former Government Adviser and currently the Chief Executive of Africa Policy Institute.

API Africa Research Notes Series publishes scientifically valid research outputs that cannot be considered as full research or methodology articles. Its aim is to provide a forum for sharing data, useful information and perspectives on topical issues of concern to the policy and research communities. Articles published under this series cut across disciplines, and include some short articles or opinion pieces that have already been published by the experts of the Africa Policy Institute. Some are brief publications, updates to previous work, abridged versions of research agendas or concept notes or brief reports of policy forums.



*<https://www.africapi.org/africa-research-notes/>
NHIF Parking Tower 5th Floor, Ragati Road
P. O. Box 34791 - 00100, Nairobi, Kenya*