

Are Kenyans Ready for Change?

By **Martha Okumu**

I would like to call the last few months *learning months* for me here in Kenya. This is because I learned a lot as a result of political uncertainty that the country experienced with the cancellation of the presidential results by the Supreme Court. The extreme reactions of joy and sadness depending on one's allegiance



Photo source: Internet. Change for growth in democracy is like a plant

came to the fore, in many instances leading to a deeply divided country. Politics plays a core role in the very existence of a people. This is because, as citizens, your roles and responsibilities are governed by state actors as anchored in the country's constitution and therefore one's participation in the governance process becomes vital. From choosing the leaders that represent your interest and having them enact laws that protect the interest of the Nation to employing staff with competencies to implement the country's vision as put forth by citizens through public participatory activities.

Therefore, when the process of choosing our leaders elicits concerns, then as citizens we need to look at the situation in an objective manner, with the aim of correcting mistakes

made and ensuring that the process meets the expectations as prescribed in the various laws

on the electoral process as well looking at the conduct of officers who have been mandated to ensure that the exercise is done in a free and fair manner. The idea that no one holds themselves accountable when decision made are not implemented to the full is unacceptable and that as a country, we are content to let matters slide is a reflection of values that we uphold.

Looking at political parties and institutions in place, a great percentage of Kenyans actively involved in party matters is wanting, giving an opportunity for party leaders to push forth their personal agendas. In this case, if a party leader is dissatisfied, they tend to form their own party or as has been observed lately, work against their party and resign by word of mouth without formally resigning from their party and taking the people who elected him or her based on their party for a ride. Also, political parties' officials are to blame as the process of striking off these leaders is slow and in most cases not completed before the General Elections takes place. This can also be attributed to the inaction of party members in party matters and holding officials and leaders accountable at the party level.

This then spills over to national politics where all citizens then become affected by



Change is a process. Photo Source Internet

incompetency from elected leaders. This can then trickle down to the employees elected at both County and National Governments and Government Institutions.

As enshrined in the 2010 constitution of Kenya and Acts like the County Government Act of 2012, the citizens have the mandate to be actively involved in matters that have an impact on them. They need to embrace this. A majority of Kenyans do not recognise the powers given to them under the constitution that allows them to make their leaders accountable for their actions as custodians of the resources bestowed to them from the citizen's taxes. It is from these taxes that political parties do draw upon for their existence as well as membership fees and therefore, it is imperative that we know how they are making use of these resources. For example, are they being used to sponsor Bills that are beneficial to the community or where are these funds directed to?

The use of our taxes should also be a major concern. With the wage bill of Kenya expected to rise to Kshs. 650 Billion, we need to critically scrutinize the work of the political leaders and the government of the day in terms of spending of these resources and not being under the yoke of huge sums of money being spent in gratuity for political leaders and sacked incompetent civil servants. It is therefore vital that we as Kenyans play an active role in ensuring state resources are used wisely by ensuring that the political leaders in place are leaders with competencies and integrity as per chapter six of the constitution, as we've delegated these roles to them as our representatives. Also, frequent dialogue with leaders will ensure that our wishes are heard and implemented as per the County Plans which

are centred on education, health, transport and economic development which play a role in the holistic wellbeing of an individual person at both County and National Government level in the form of the National Budget.

In concluding and referencing my first statement, as stated by the French Philosopher Joseph-Marie comte de Maistre "*Every Nation Gets the Government it Deserves*". We therefore cannot shift our roles and responsibilities in the political maneuvering and fiascos that have plagued Kenya as a country since independence. As citizens, we need to take a hard look at ourselves and do a self-analysis on our role that has contributed to the situation we find ourselves in today, then embrace our values as stated in the Constitution and contribute in making meaningful changes in spite of our political, ethnic, cultural, political, socio-economic or religious background in order to make Kenya achieve its Developmental Goals.

Art for Peace

By Rachel Akinyi

Elections in Kenya have been quiet expensive as they disrupt the country's Peace. During this time unpleasant imageries and thoughts are at the back of one's mind. The negative thoughts are usually as a result of previous experiences characterized by the reign of ethnic divide, trickery and bribery used to garner votes, dissatisfactory results, demonstrations, police brutality and loss of lives.

It's due to such anticipations that a tense atmosphere lingers every time the country nears the general voting period. Thereby explaining why Peace actors have initiated campaigns, walks and events as a means of

promoting peace during the 2017 pre and post general elections. Most of these activities have used art as a tool in the pursuit of harmony. The main reason being, *“Art transcends our differences and unites us as one people, one nation”* as stated by Unga Dola.

The Unga wa Dola initiative introduced the slogan **#ArtForPeace** with an aim of uniting diverse artists in Kenya and peace actors in an attempt to ensure no conflict arose during the general elections. They created an online platform where poets, musicians, painters and others could submit their artworks in July 2017. In line with this, the Red Cross also created an online **Uchaguzi Peace wall** where Kenyans had been encouraged to share an overflow of poems, messages and quotes of peace. It's actually during the same month that a peace activism campaign was launched. The artists would use expressive exhibitions to channel their messages. <https://businesstoday.co.ke/peace-campaign-targets-art-enthusiasts/>.

The idea of peace without justice has been quiet an elusive thought after the results of the 2017 elections. The term justice takes centre stage after various citizens lost their lives all in the name of police brutality in various parts of the country after the general elections. Events characterized by peace demonstrations, stray bullets and systematic dehumanization have since shaken Kenya's stability. However, artists and peace actors are still at it, trying to ensure peace reigns alongside justice. Solomon Munyondo aka **Solo**, a visual artist at Kibera is best recognized this year for his peace messages. A larger part of Kibera is water marked by his peace slogans. One of his post election slogans that made rounds on social media is **'Peace Wanted Alive'**.

<http://www.africanews.com/2017/08/26/peace-wanted-alive-kenyan-graffiti-artist-s-post-election-message//>

Kenyan musicians have voiced out their concerns over the police brutality that have since occurred in Kisumu, Kibera, Kariobangi, Mathare, western among other areas. Octopizzo has vehemently spoken against these acts during his interview Mambo Mseto. As a way of bringing calm to the community in Kibera, Octopizzo foundation took part in the emergency intervention alongside RescueBnB. The initiative involved children being offered counseling and other essential necessities such as food. Nyashinski, one of the renowned Kenyan artists has recently also released a song that speaks about the lack of humanity amongst us the citizens. The video best depicts the experiences that occurred after the election. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KT33KtcjB0>

The Spoken word community in Kenya has also played a role in championing for peace and justice. This includes spurring conversations dubbed **#risehumanity** with the aid of Nuru Bahati's photos that depict the need for justice to ensure peace reigns. Other tags include **#tribeKenya**, **#revolution** and **#WeareOne**. Events hosted by Spoken word artists such as Anika254 and StreetPoetry are working hand in hand to bring the Dyeversecity Festival to life in January 2018. The aim is to bring people together to appreciate the Kenyan culture, elevate the standards of humanity and echo the need for good governance.

Generally art has played a huge role in trying to maintain peace during the 2017 pre and post general election in Kenya. The artists have indeed stepped up as is their duty to be the voice of and for the people. However, I believe

that the impact will blow our minds when artists from all over the country will work together in oneness as a movement for peace.

Justice in Extractive Industry

By Celina Willam

Justice is what many people desire. This is especially when it comes to sharing of natural resources in a country.



Extractive Industry: Photo Source

Many countries and especially Kenya have embarked on economic development

through extractive industry in view of improving the livelihood of citizens.

Kenya has engaged in exploitation of natural resources activities for almost a decade. One of such activities is mining. Mining is an important economic activity which has the potential of contributing to the development of areas endowed with the resource. For instance, roads are constructed, airstrips, as well as increase of human activities. In spite of this, mining as an industrial activity, takes place on the natural environment, disturbing areas around where it occurs. There are waste rocks, open grounds which act as places of accidents and competition over diminishing renewable resources such as land, water and housing.

The benefits of extractive industry are negligible. There are various reasons as to why the benefits are minimal. On one hand, the industries want to make high profits and on the other hand the locals where these extractive

industries are situated may lack technological knowhow. This makes it hard for the natives to participate significantly in the operation of the industries. Apart from this, the private partners in extractive industry may be foreigners and therefore take all the benefits to their country of origin, leaving the community with almost nothing. This calls for justice in extractive industry where the communities need to benefit from the extracted resources.

Titanium mining operations, which is an example of extractive industry in Kenya, has affected the livelihoods of resettled communities in Kwale County. The people of Kinango, Kinondo and Msambweni have been displaced to create room for titanium. The resettlement process of displaced communities was not done fairly. The residents were not compensated for their crops, houses and other facilities adequately.

Titanium promised to offer employment opportunities to the children of the displaced communities. However, they did not receive it. Apart from this, the lands where affected communities were resettled were not favourable for Agriculture. This brought famine among the displaced people in kwale.

The social amenities such as schools, hospitals and market for the



Photo source-Internet

agricultural products were built far apart from where the people settled. This has made it almost impossible for children to get to school on time. As a result, the pupils' academic performance has gone down. Air, noise and water pollution

have significantly increased and the living standards deteriorated.



Extractive Industry .Photo source-Internet

Although the extractive industry was seen as means of developing the

communities where it is situated, people in Kwale have a different experience.

The above mentioned facts indicate that there is need for evaluation of the terms and condition of extractive industry in Kenya and especially in Kwale.

The evaluation should be specifically on resettling process which many communities are not satisfied about. The extractive industry should be compelled to fulfill the pledges it made to the locals on provision of employment opportunities to the displaced families` children. This will flourish justice and peace in places where extraction takes place.

Finally, in seeking justice, most communities in Kwale just want to benefit from mining through equity stakes, infrastructure development, job creation and improved livelihood. To achieve this, regulations that provide more participatory rights to the communities need to be laid down. This will promote equity as communities will have more say on how to share the resources. Equal sharing of resources will promote justice and as a result peace will prevail.

Best of wishes from Peace Tree Network

Happy Holidays!