

Reflections on Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, a government policy paper that widened the economic, social and political divide in Kenya

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Backdrop

In Kenya, national philosophies are taught in History and Government form 4, unit 27. According to Julius (2011), national philosophies refer to a set or system of ideological beliefs and values which became widely accepted within a particular country. The History curriculum has approved the teaching and learning of three national philosophies: African socialism and Harambee and Nyayo philosophy.

This article reflects on African socialism, which is anchored in Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, titled “African socialism and its application to planning in Kenya”. African socialism, as noted by Emmanuel (2012), was born out of the desire by African leaders to create a new society, different from colonial society, which embraced equity devoid of race, oppression and social injustice. Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, aimed at promoting political equity, social justice, human dignity, freedom from want, diseases and exploitation, equal opportunities and high and growing income per capita, as well as equitable distribution of resources and services (Julius, 2011). Sessional Paper No 10 was built on equity based on African socialism, equity implying fairness, as noted by Shem (2016). The ideas of Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, were acceptable and desirable by every Kenyan, against the backdrop of colonialism where equity was a pipe dream for Africans.

During the colonial period, Kenyans were familiar with inequality, which basically referred to uneven distribution of resources, both material and services. Therefore, Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, was welcome as it was seen to ensure equity.

Scholars in Kenya have critiqued Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, in various ways (Shem, 2016):

- Barack Obama Snr and Dharam Ghai: The paper is not socialist enough.
- David Ndi: The paper is development fundamentalism.

- Mutakha Khangu: The paper is a policy Malfunction.
- Okoth Ogendo: The paper is neither a political philosophy nor a plan but a simple answer to public clamour for an ideological government.
- I share my voice on this policy paper, which forms the basis of African socialism, which I teach in form 4 under the following reflections:

Economic reflections

Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, article 133, states that “to make the economy as a whole grow as fast as possible development money should be invested where it would yield the largest increase in output”. This strategy favoured and encouraged development in areas with abundant natural resources and people receptive and active in development. Usually, these are areas where the political elite came from and could influence for more allocation of public resources and services. This resulted in economic marginalisation of many parts of Kenya, particularly the arid and semi-arid areas, which were thought not to have the potential to yield the largest increase in output, like the tea and coffee growing areas. However, the arid and semi-arid areas had high potential for livestock production and other natural resources, which, by the time of publication of this sessional paper, had not been well exploited.

Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, widened the economic divide, thereby increasing levels of poverty in Kenya, which other sessional papers in Kenya and the Kenya Constitution (2010) attempted to address.

Social reflections

Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, failed to develop Kenya socially as envisaged because freedom from want (poverty), eradication of diseases and social justice have largely remained in the realm of political rhetoric (Shem, 2016) with no tangible achievements. Today, high levels of poverty fuelled by runaway corruption and unprecedented youth unemployment remain the greatest challenge and task facing the people of Kenya. As noted by Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, the enemies of independent Kenya were poverty, ignorance and diseases. The same have persisted to a certain extent. Equity, in terms of equal opportunities, has been hijacked by rewarding of political cronyism both at the national government and county government levels. Access to both public offices and resources suffers from the same problem of political cronyism. Cronyism has fuelled ethnic-based politics, reflected in

tribal political parties and political appointments. This has aggravated ethnic attitudes and sentiments.

Political reflections

Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, was implemented politically by the ruling elite through calculated constitutional changes—the first being the abolition of the progressive Majimbo constitution that had been adopted at independence (1964) and its resultant political consequences. Constitutional amendments were made at an average of one per year (Shem, 2016). These constitutional amendments are taught in form 2, unit 6, under the sub-topic “constitutional amendments in Kenya since independence”. They climaxed in the creation of a dictatorial one-party state in Kenya with the 19th Amendment Act of 1982, section 2A.

The constitutional amendments were occasioned by the desire of the political elite to shake off opposition and strengthen themselves through instruments of law (Shem, 2016). Kenya drifted towards an undemocratic and authoritarian administrative structure centred on imperial precedent. Indeed, Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, failed politically by downgrading the constitution, and African elitism replaced colonial masters—a sad scenario that has been a burden and concern for the Kenyan people since independence.

Politically, this caused a clamour for change to the constitution, which saw some success with the 1991 amendment to section 2A that reverted Kenya to a multi-party state and continued pressure for a new constitution, which was achieved in 2010. The new constitution was born of blood and tears, a cost Kenyans had to pay for over four decades. Indeed, it was a high cost for Kenya, economically, politically and socially.

Conclusion

Sessional Paper No 10, 1965, was a false start for Kenya’s economic, political and social agenda, occasioned by the greedy appetites of the Kenyan political elite to entrench themselves at the expense of the Kenyan masses. Kenyans have paid a heavy price in trying to start again, particularly through the long road to the adoption of the 2010 constitution. The way forward is to embrace and fully implement the 2010 constitution and its national values such as inclusivity, public participation, integrity and equity, among others.

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