



Active Non-Violence Movement in Kenya

My Life, My Message

Challenges and opportunities for peace building and conflict resolution towards elections 2017 in Kenya

1.0 Background and Introduction

Kenya has seen exciting political times in the last four years. After elections 2013, the country was gripped by the possibility of both the president and his deputy being convicted at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. They were both left off the hook one after the other. The two had barely settled when it emerged that there were many cases of alleged high level corruption highlighted by the opposition coalition. The previously hurting opposition Coalition CORD¹, soon became robust and has since been going all over the country unveiling one corrupt action after another, placing the government in defense mode. The exciting bit is that the same government had been mocking the opposition as weak and ineffective for nearly three years. The current call for corrupt powerful agents in government to resign comes in the wake of another election slated for 8th. August 2017. Earlier in year, the opposition party went to the streets demanding a fresh review of election laws as well as the disbandment of the electoral commission. The church joined in the fray, seeking fair alternative dispute resolution and arbitration of the standoff. Within weeks of its involvement, religious leaders were tasked with finding a new team of commissioners for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). A great responsibility and trust!

2.0 Challenges

2.1 Terrorism and national security

Terrorism and National security matters still preoccupy the nation. The Kenya Defense Forces is still in Somalia, almost six years since it was deployed to fight Al-Shabaab. Parts of the country are still gripped by terror attacks. Regions such as the coastal Lamu, Garissa, Mandera and Mombasa are still prone to attacks even as security has been stepped up. Countering violent extremism programs has become popular with human rights organizations in the aforementioned counties. In other areas, youth gangs are emanating, and may, fearfully become more daring as elections 2017 come closer.

2.2 Charged and Competitive Elections

Competitive Elections are less than a year away. This has put many economic activities off the burner. With elections, the political class is funning hate speech and name calling leading to both economic corruption and "political corruption" Ethnicity is being wiped on

¹ Coalition for Reforms and Democracy

political podiums as if 2007/2008² never happened. Traditional foci for violence are still intact, even as new frontiers for violence emanate from the Counties³, a result of the constitution 2010. There are resource based quarrels and border based skirmishes out of new counties formed in 2010 and actualized in 2013. The old cattle rustling –closely linked to political financing is taking place on a regular basis. Northern Kenya is particularly susceptible to this.

2.3 Shrinking space for civil society organizations

Continued shrinking space for civil society has posed a threat to good governance and peace, to a level where they are simply ignored by hate mongers and the political class. Further, perception that the CSOs sent the leadership to the Hague has not stopped, hence they are considered “evil society” by the political class. The CSO has been drastically weakened. The fact that Kenya is now considered a developed economy has also reduced funding to CSOs from development partners.

2.4 A weakening media?

The Kenyan media has faced frustrations in the recent past to a point of complicity. The leading media house seems to write stories that please regional population rather than come out fair and just. This is slowly making mainstream media look biased and unbelievable. Many community members are resorting to deeply slanted local FM radio stations and social media. Social media has a tendency to spew highly scandalizing information whose veracity is difficult to know. Often mainstream media picks up information from social media. The press, print and electronic media has been relegated to private business, as many of the political stalwarts have bought media houses. The private sector is seeking “peaceful elections” rather than “credible elections” making the less trusted by the opposition party.

3.0 Opportunities

Notwithstanding the challenges mentioned above, there are opportunities presented by both the moment and context scenarios. These include:

a) Religious organizations/groups

There is a growing respect and acceptance of religious leaders, organizations and groups by the general citizenry as credible, moral and unbiased arbiters in political contests. At the moment religious leaders are leading the panel that is selecting the new electoral body in readiness for the year 2017 election. Even as nations are going nationalistic, local CSOs are weakened, media is distrusted, and political leadership weak, religious leaders are being given increasing space to act and talk about ills of the country leadership. Religious leaders are largely respected for their opinion. Interestingly, the religious divide seems to be narrowing between faiths and among sects.

b) Devolved/County governments

² Post-Election Violence following mishandled elections in 2007/2008 that led to deaths and mass displacements.

³ There are 47 devolved units called Counties across the country.

The new constitution 2010 brought to the fore county governments which now form the foci for redressing historical injustices. Though they are also foci for new conflicts, these are easily manageable. The Constitution has also brought with it progressive legislation and freedoms that target rights and social accountability by both the county and national government. This has seen pressure mounted by various stakeholders that has seen at least six cabinet ministers sacked members of the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission vetted and .heightened pressure for government to be more accountable to the citizenry.

c) Alternative Dispute Resolution

Alternative dispute resolution including dialogue, interreligious dialogue, and community forms of dispute resolution, active nonviolence approaches to conflicts resolution are gaining currency. Backlog cases in courts, opportunities to ease tension of political and ethnic nature and need for healing has seen an increase in demand for ADR as a form of conflict resolution rather than lengthy court processes. This offers a middle ground for conflict resolution based on dialogue and non-violence.

4.0 What has Chemchemi Ya Ukweli interventions been?

In addressing some of these challenges, Chemchemi Ya Ukweli has worked on interventions that

- a) Sought to counter terrorism and extremist violence in select counties. CYU has particularly been active in new frontier counties for violent extremism such as Isiolo and Nakuru where though extremism is not fully fledged, all the potential for occurrence are evident.
- b) Worked within the auspices of Kenya Peace Network to support the development of alternative dispute resolution mechanism, to seek to temper the behavior of leaders and leveraged it through religious formations to bring sensibility to political discourse. CYU has been working with partners for “issuefication” of political discussions rather than name calling and hate mongering among the political class.
- c) Just like other CSOs, CYU has equally suffered the donor fatigue and closing space for civil society organizations. CYU has been working in peace networks to seek to secure both its space in matters of governance, peace and non-violence as well as to leverage resources and ensure smooth running of programs.
- d) While showing great concern for the trend in media, CYU has leveraged on community radio stations and sought to deliver balanced information, even within the slanted platform, and used local languages as a way of countering negative information across selected counties.

5.0 Proposed Way Forward

Going forward, CYU proposes:

- a) An extended programming on counter violent extremism in watershed⁴ counties.
- b) Continued strengthening of religious formation and use of alternative dispute resolution (Inter-Religious Dialogue & Active Non Violence) in national peace building and political “issuefication” as the country moves towards elections 2017 and beyond.
- c) Strengthen networks and partnerships to spread peace messages across the country. CYU proposes the continued use of various media platforms and influence mainstream media to focus on issues rather than personalities in the next election and beyond.
- d) The continued strengthening of peace models through active non-violence, inter religious dialogue and alternative dispute resolutions.

⁴ Counties outside the main areas where jihadists activities have been very active such as Kajiado, Kiambu, Isiolo, Nakuru, Kakamega, Marsabit, West Pokot and Uasin Gishu,

e) Continued strengthening of Social Audit community groups and support citizen participation in devolved governance.

6.0 What CYU Needs

- a) Partnerships with Pax Christi International and her members
- b) Financial Support
- c) Technical support
- d) Other relevant materials and networks