

Kenya: Our Possible Futures; Our Choices

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We knew or should have known that it was coming. But somehow we thought or believed, as the most corrupt country in the region, that we could bribe our way out of catastrophe. That was the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya. Then, as now, we knew what our possible futures could be and what choices we had to make. We made bad choices or refused to make real choices at all. To avoid the recurrence of the 2007 events and to reach true and full reconciliation, Kenyans will have to make real choices about what future they want individually and as a community; as a nation. We have powerful insights and tools, but will we use them?

Our Possible Futures: Thinking through scenarios

On 14 April 2000, the Society for International Development (SID) and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) launched “*Kenya at the Crossroads -Scenarios for our Future*” (<http://www.kenyascenarios.org/default.html>). This work, the result of intense research, analysis and workshops of Kenyans from various ages, backgrounds and professions, presented four possible futures for Kenya. While this was during the days of the KANU regime, Kenya remains, more or less, at the same crossroads. Following the violence of 2007/2008, the stakes are even higher. We had the tools, we had the insight but we didn’t act or acted too late. We have a second chance at modelling a prosperous future - will we take it?

While scenarios are not predictions of the future, they are challenging, relevant and plausible stories about the future. They are concerned with the historical, political, economic, societal, ethical, technological and environmental pressures that could affect Kenya, as a country, and the way it functions. As we look at the future of Kenya, thinking through scenarios offers a tool to generate constructive policy dialogue. They offer realistic outcomes with which Kenya might be faced and can therefore help Kenyans make more informed decisions about their actions today.

Kenya at the Crossroads – Scenarios for our Future examined four possible scenarios of Kenya’s future, namely:

- *El Nino* – a future characterised by maintaining the status quo leading to heightened tensions and, ultimately, a country fractured into regional and ethnic enclaves. It is a future of decline and disintegration.
- *Maendeleo* – a future where transformation concentrates on reordering the economy while postponing agreements on needed political reform. It is a future of rapid gains but full of inequalities and instability.
- *Katiba* – a future where the focus is on institutional reorganisation and creation of democratic and locally accountable institutions. It is, however, a future of responsive institutions with little economic transformation and heightened poverty.
- *Flying Geese* – a future defined by a departure from destructive politics; reorganised institutions that improve representation and participation reflecting the diversity of Kenya’s people; and radical economic transformation. It is a future of inclusive reforms of both the major political and social institutions and the economy.

The choices Kenyans are making today, as they argue about a local tribunal versus the

International Criminal Court (ICC) to try post-election violence suspects; a new constitution; truth and reconciliation and a myriad other issues under Agenda Four of the National Accord will determine whether we can hope for a Kenya at peace with itself, a regional leader and a constructive player on the international stage.

Our Choices

There are many forces and pressures that will impact Kenya going forward. These include historical, political, economic, social, environmental and technological forces and pressures. Kenyans might not have full control of these forces or pressures. But, by clearly identifying the main drivers of these key forces and pressures; the key actors; and the early signals for each scenario, as is done in the *Kenya at the Crossroads* booklet, we can start to think more clearly about the future and prepare for what might happen. Most importantly, we can make decisions now that are painful and costly but which would save us from an *El Niño* scenario.

Kenya's possible paths into the future are fairly well articulated in *Kenya at the Crossroads*. In addition, the possible paths of East Africa, as a region, have now also been articulated in “*What do we want? What might we become? Imagining the future of East Africa*” (<http://www.sidint.org/Content.aspx?IdArea=15&IdCat=47&IdScat=45&Type=S>), the outcome of a scenario project on the future of East Africa.

There is no doubt that the *Flying Geese* scenario offers the most desirable outcome for Kenya. Equally, however, judging by the political actions of the Grand Coalition government and the general focus of Kenyans today (mainly political and institutional), steering Kenya's path towards the *Flying Geese* scenario will require new leadership, new thinking and an ability to dare to think and live differently on the part of the majority of Kenyans. Since 2000, we have made choices that resulted in some form of combination of the *El Nino* and *Maendeleo* scenarios. We know where those decisions took us in December 2007.

Our choices as Kenyans, if we are to avoid what we saw after the 2007 elections or worse, will have to be those that lead us away from the path of decline and disintegration and towards the path of inclusive democracy and growth. We cannot hope to ignore history (in its fullness) and make bad choices in political leadership, economic stewardship, social, environmental and technological policies and think that we can always bribe our way out.

How can thinking through scenarios help Kenya make the right choices in the future? To address the challenges that Kenya faces, we have to be able to navigate through the complexity of the problems and the underlying drivers, build a shared understanding of these problems, and develop a coherent strategy. Scenarios can make three contributions. First, they can help Kenyan decision-makers explore the country's problems by combining knowledge from many perspectives. In this way, scenarios help us recognise uncertainty: both the known unknowns and the unknown unknowns. Second, scenarios can provide a platform for discussing different worldviews more constructively. This is because the process of projecting into the future and examining multiple possibilities can help transport people out of their worldview that is only based on the knowledge they have about today. Finally, by asking the question “what if”, we can better frame the challenges we face and prevent critical mistakes.

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