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**ASSESSMENT OF SESSIONAL PAPER NO 10, 1965 IN THE CONTEXT OF EQUITY AND  
DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA**

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## **Introduction**

Kenya's 1965 Sessional Paper Number 10 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya was conceptually based on government planning as a tool for socio-economic development. This tool was meant to guide economic growth – that was built around equity informed by African Socialism. **Equity** connotes fairness. It derives from a concept of social justice and represents a belief that there are some things which people should have, that there are basic needs that should be fulfilled, that burdens and rewards should not be spread too divergently across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness and justice towards these ends.

The concept of **inequality** on the other hand revolves around the uneven distribution of resources whether they be material or service resources. **Inequality** is a function of distribution of resources. People talk about inequality because some are being given better treatment than others. Inequality therefore, means the differences in the distribution of resources among people, regions, different geographic administrative units. At a country level, it means the differences among the regions and can also be assessed in terms of the differences between the urban and the rural areas.

An assessment today of whether the paper achieved the twin objectives of equity and development is highly debatable. A number of scholars critiqued the document and had the following to say:

- Barrack Obama Snr and Dharam Ghai critiqued the document for being neither African nor socialist enough.

- David Ndii referred to the adoption of Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965 as development fundamentalism.
- Mutakha Khangu referred to it as a policy malfunction.
- Okoth Ogendo opined that the Sessional Paper No 10 was neither a political philosophy nor a plan, but rather, a simple answer to public clamour for an ideology of government.

This brief paper is an assessment of policy drivers that are globally known to drive equity and development. Did the Sessional Paper achieve this or was it the foundation of Kenya's highly unequal society today<sup>1</sup>?

### **Key policy drivers of the sessional paper no 10, 1965.**

In its opening paragraphs, the paper sets out the vision in the following terms:

- Political equality.
- Social justice.
- Human dignity, including freedom of conscience.
- Freedom from want, disease and exploitation.
- Equal opportunities.
- High and growing per capita incomes, equitably distributed.

The six-point vision which espoused equity and development was not surprising. The country had just emerged from a colonial era where power and political freedom was denied to the majority indigenous African population. However immediately after ascending into power in 1964, a major political development had preceded the political equality vision with purposeful ambiguity. The ruling elite did away with the progressive majimbo constitution forcing political proponents of majimboism to dissolve and create a centralist government that was no different from that of the colonial era.

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<sup>1</sup> Some regions based on provinces are known to have HDI of middle income countries while others are of low income countries. Significantly the middle income regions have been regions that occupied the presidency

The implementation of the Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965 went hand in hand with constitutional amendments at an average of one per year – with far reaching political and legal effect in the country. These amendments to the Constitution were occasioned by the political elite’s desire to shake-off opposition by strengthening themselves via the instrumentalities of the law. Part of the initial amendments therefore involved an attempt, albeit misguided, to harmonise the operations of a fairly democratic constitution with an undemocratic and authoritarian administrative structure. The result was that the constitution was effectively downgraded.

African elitism thus replaced colonial elitism. The consequence of this development compromised other visions of the sessional paper. Social justice vision faded away as a distant mirage as the elite developed a voracious appetite for acquisition and consumption of public assets. ‘Eating’ for the select few at the top of the political food chain had just started and the majority poor ‘fed on the crumbs’ (this seems to be happening even today).

Human dignity, including freedom of conscience was brutally suppressed as the regime in control continued with a policy of detention without trial, assassinations culminating in constitutional amendments that criminalized multipartism. The mutilation of this vision only ended in 1991 by the repeal of section 2A of the Constitution, and though a new constitution was enacted in 2010, there are palpable claw-backs of these freedoms.

The vision of freedom from want, disease and exploitation has been long on promises and political rhetoric and short on tangible achievements. Poverty is still rampant; youth unemployment is entering a critical phase of fatalism and terrorism is a new emerging threat.

The vision on equal opportunities has been blurred by the unbridled policy choices of rewarding political cronyism particularly in the context of access to public offices and resources. From the time of the first president access to public offices has favoured those in power and those of their ethnic hue based on the politics of singular identity-my tribe.

Finally, the vision of high and growing per capita incomes that is equally distributed has continued to plague planners as it was wrongly conceptualized from the very beginning. Today, we are still

a country that exports primary goods with little value addition, our manufacturing has stagnated and informal enterprises have grown and become residual career choices for highly trained Kenyans. This development has resulted in Kenya being classified as one of the most unequal societies in the world. See annex 1. for critique of selected provisions.

### **What relevance does Sessional Paper No 10 have on equity and development today?**

Since the drafting of the sessional paper, a number of other planning papers have been drafted. These are Sessional paper no 14 of 1975 on cooperative development policy; District focus for Rural Development; Sessional Paper No 1 of 1986 on economic management for renewed growth; Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in 2001; Economic Recovery for wealth and employment creation (2003-2007); Vision 2030; Medium term plans etc.

However as noted earlier, the thinking around sessional paper no 10 in terms of equity and development suffered bad leadership and poor governance in implementation right from when the paper was mooted. This has had a contagion effect on all other sessional papers in ways that have been systemic. Governance institutions and state owned enterprises has suffered leading to poor service delivery and stunted development outcomes.

The only notable positive blip was the drafting of the ERS which was written at time when a large majority of Kenyans had lost confidence in major governance institutions and the economy had recorded negative growth of -0.2%. The ERS was written after Kenyans had overwhelmingly given the mandate to govern to a team of opposition leaders who mobilized the electorate on the theme of change. When this team took over leadership, Kenyans were voted as the most optimistic people in the world and citizens demonstrated this by leading the fight against corruption by arresting police officers who were caught taking bribes. Indeed, the ERS called for a major shift in governance noting that since the 1960s the economy had been on a secular decline and required a major realignment in development and planning. In the terminal year of the ERS in 2007, the economy was growing by 7%.

Though efforts and resources had been deployed in key governance institutions to restore confidence, still the thinking that informed Sessional Paper No 10 permeated all other planning papers and the civil service (key implementers) it would seem, had developed hard and entrenched positions despite changes in political leadership through elections. This came to a head in the 2007 elections which were highly compromised and pointed to the result of years of institutional weakening that had started in Kenya's first year of independence. The death of 1300 Kenyans, the displacement of 600,000 and the reliance on the International Justice system was a wakeup call that the foundations under which Sessional paper number 10 and its siblings were weak and needed to be reinforced.

### **In Conclusion: The New Constitution**

The new constitution is built on devolution along the same lines that the independence constitution advocated. This is perhaps the legal and policy framework that Sessional Paper No 10 and its six-point vision lacked to push for equity and development. It was mutilated by the greed for power and resources and any other subsequent planning process suffered the same fate. An assessment of the paper would not be complete without looking at the broad vision under the new constitution and whether the six-point vision would have found better traction for equity and development to take place.

## **Annex 1: Review of selected provisions of Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965**

### **I. Provincial balance and Social Inertia**

Critics have pointed out that the independence government took inheritance at the development and policy level through Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on *“African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya”*.

The government adopted the colonial governance, development and investment policies that engendered and entrenchment of regional disparities. For example, the provision of paragraph **133 which is on “Provincial Balance and Social Inertia”** emphatically states that;

*“One of our problems is to decide how much priority we should give in investing in less developed provinces. To make the economy as a whole grow as fast as possible, development money should be invested where it will yield the largest increase in output. This approach will clearly favour the development of areas having abundant natural resources, good land and rainfall, transport and power facilities, and people receptive to and active in development. A million pounds invested in one area may raise net output by £20,000 while its use in another may yield an increase of £100,000. This is a clear case in which investment in the second area is the wise decision because the country is £80,000 per annum better off by so doing and is therefore in a position to aid the first area by making grants or subsidized loans.”*

This paragraph alludes to the government preferred mode of redistribution. The provision also points to the adoption of the colonial development and investment policy, by extending the concept of zoning beyond land, to cover even people. High medium and low potential people in terms of their receptiveness and activeness in development were identified and this played a major role in deciding where and when to invest. The government would therefore invest resources in high potential areas in priority over low potential areas. It also provided that the profits generated from the high potential area would be used to aid the low potential areas by way of loans. Scholars have pointed out that whether subsidized or not, there was absolutely no justification in giving investment money to other areas in the form of loans.

Further, the understanding by the bureaucrats of high potential areas were areas that were agriculturally productive, and that had been developed by the colonial government.

Economist David Ndiu coined the term “the Chlorophyll Zone” the action of dividing up the country into a hierarchy of six agro-ecological zones. Zone 1 was the former White Highlands, where tea and coffee, the country’s main export crops, were grown. This was the “highest potential area”. Zone 6, the arid country of the north where “nothing” grew, was the area with the lowest potential in terms of agriculture, but with high potential in livestock.

Further, the government adopted the colonial policies that had encouraged the migration of human resources from “low potential” to “high potential” areas or regions. **Paragraph 134 of the Sessional Paper provides in this regard as follows:**

*“The purpose of development is not to develop an area, but to develop and make better off the people of the area. If an area is deficient in resources, this can best be done by-”*

- (i) investing in the education and training of the people whether in the area or elsewhere;*
- (ii) investing in the health of the people; and*
- (iii) encouraging some of the people to move to areas richer in resources; and of course*
- (iv) developing those limited resources that are economic*

*With education and training and some capital, the people of a Province can make the best of limited resources. If the potential for expansion is small, medical services, education and training will qualify the people to find employment elsewhere.*

The approach of this paper continued the system of disparities which further centralized resources in Nairobi and major urban centres.

With a centralized system in place Kenyatta is reported to have one time ordered that the Asian businessmen who were doing business in small towns to move from small centres to big towns and leave small towns to the Africans. Many Africans were very happy about the order but after

the Asians left, growth in most of those towns stagnated to date. What was not realized at the time was that the directive precipitated capital flight as the Asians moved with their investment money.

## **II. African Socialism and its applicability to planning in Kenya**

Critics have questioned whether the title wasn't misleading. What would have been the most appropriate title - Kenya socialism or African socialism? African socialism wasn't defined. Further, the it would have been appropriate to have indication of characteristics of Kenya's uniqueness before thinking of its applicability. Applicability of socialism to planning would have been expected to take into consideration Kenya's unique contexts. Scholars have opined that the ideology was undefined and questioned whether plans then followed the conditions prevailing in the country then, pointing out that the applicability of planning within African socialism, could not be divorced from the politico-socio- cultural context that the Sessional paper ignored.

## **III. Africanization and Nationalization**

Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965 explicitly argued a case for rejecting both laissez-faire and the doctrinaire command economy approaches. The paper was essentially the genesis and evolution of privatization policy in Kenya. It attempted to devise and close an argument for a substantially expanded private sector that would underwrite greater opportunities for African private accumulation and more rapid Africanization of the economy. The paper and subsequent policies were mainly concerned with the state's acquisition of private assets. It was characterized as follows:

- The state would clearly play a substantial role, that of a developmentalist state in spearheading the Africanization of the economy.
- Foreign investors were welcome as long as they were willing to make some of the shareholding available to Africans willing to buy them, and employ suitably qualified Africans to managerial positions
- Nationalization would be highly selective, seeking to buy into or control firms that would accelerate economic growth without reducing domestic resources for investing in physical and social infrastructure.

- Nationalization of firms would be operated efficiently, covering their costs and contributing a profit (equivalent of forgone tax) to the treasury

It is worth noting that Nationalization combined with Africanization continued to extend the Government economic trusteeship over greater sections of the economy by severely limiting the activities of non-citizens. In 1968, the Ndegwa Commission recommended that public servants could engage into economic activities without prejudice to their public duty. By mid-1970s, the government had become more assertive in its Africanization process.

However, the rapid expansion of the state, in public enterprises, regulation, and promoting African business, had not been matched by a similar expansion in human development. Primitive accumulation set in, in earnest. The political and economic elites firmly entrenched themselves, with cronyism setting the country to a more unequitable path. Further, the supposedly “benevolent guiding hand” of the government soon turned into a partisan controlling one as the state over extended itself in the coming years. This stifled private sector.