

Africa Forum Talk. 1st November 2024

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Introduction

My recent period of several weeks in Kenya, undertaking *pro-bono* advisory work with schools and educational institutions, brought me into contact with some of the radical changes and events that have recently become part of the East African Community's (EAC) environment.

Many members of the Africa Forum have been involved in this region in the past. It consists of eight countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, DRC, South Sudan and Burundi. Some of the recent experiences of Kenya are rippling out into other countries within the EAC, and they are increasingly having a pan-Africa effect.

1. The 2024 Finance Bill riot and GenZ.

In Kenya in June 2024 President Ruto introduced a new Finance Bill. This was designed to help repay his predecessor's debts and eliminate poverty. This involved significant increases in taxation for the middle classes, who make up the 17% of Kenyan nationals who have formal work. There were also planned increases in taxation for all the population in many less obvious ways, such as fuel and mobile money transfers and bread. In doing so the government greatly miscalculated the feelings of the population, especially the young, well-educated professional classes, for whom Kenya's already high taxation regime is becoming onerous. These young people, technically born between 1997 and 2012 have become known as Generation Z, or GenZ. They set up a 2024 Action Plan on behalf of all Kenyans which demanded radical reform with a series of 50 key actions and started to protest on the streets of Nairobi, gaining international attention. The protest started as a peaceful demonstration, but it quickly became more violent with goons and agitators joining the protests, jumping on the bandwagon of peaceful protest. Some were professional agitators paid by the security forces to give reason for their violent repression. The protesters broke into the Parliament building in Nairobi and set part of it alight.

The beleaguered President then authorised the security forces to use live ammunition and tear gas. They apprehended large numbers of protesters in unmarked cars and drove them to unknown destinations without legal representation. Many were killed and injured. The protesters were wise in communicating with one another by social media, specifically X and TikTok, so the security forces found it difficult identifying and extracting protesters who were actually the leaders.

Among the key demands of the protesters were to eliminate the endemic corruption within the ruling classes and reduce the executive wage bills. They also decried the job market which forced many well-educated young people to go abroad for work, often well below their educational status. Many of the President's associates were flaunting their wealth and that of their wives and families, with no clear indication of how this had been earned by legitimate means.

The outcome was to force the President to cancel the planned Finance Bill and the elevation in taxes associated with it. Many other changes were brought in such as the dismissal of many members of the Government and the Cabinet (although many have since been re-instated apparently).

GenZ are refusing to be defined by politicians' interests and are starting to fight for what is legitimately theirs. Their resilience is being seen as heroic and is sending a strong message to other countries in the EAC and more widely in Sub-Saharan Africa. With three-quarters of Africa's population being under 35, the power of young people is increasingly being recognised by African politicians. Many will see President Ruto's U turn as proof that with enough determination the leaders can be made to listen and be held to account.

It is worrying however that the constitution of many East African countries is being widely disregarded. It is supposed to preserve the respect for human life and the dignity of all persons. Amnesty International has shown much interest in the 2024 Kenyan situation and has made it clear that human rights are imperative safeguards for a safe and stable society. Members of the public

should remain vigilant to protect one another, and to release unconditionally those arrested and to respect the right to protest.

<https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/52547/gen-z-is-reshaping-kenyan-politics>
<https://shado-mag.com/act/how-kenyan-gen-z-brought-about-a-political-rejuvenation/>

The following website details the 50 action points for reform and change as demanded by GenZ in their **2024 Action Plan on behalf of all Kenyans**

<https://educationnewshub.co.ke/gen-z-latest-demands-to-president-ruto-2024-action-plan/>

2. The Shakahola Massacre

Pastor Paul Mackenzie is a self-proclaimed fundamentalist and evangelical Christian pastor who was based in his church in Malindi in the coastal region of south-east Kenya.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakahola_Forest_incident

In April 2023 police discovered that Pastor Mackenzie had established a religious commune in the remote Shakahola forest, hours west of Malindi, in what he called 'The Good News International Church'. Here many hundreds of his followers were convinced that starvation would hasten their escape from this life to be with Jesus. As a result, many died, especially children, from fasting, sickness and physical trauma. Some 400 bodies have been exhumed from the ground. Pastor Mackenzie and many of his agents are currently in prison in Nairobi, accused of 'terrorism' crimes.

Disturbingly while the exhumation has been taking place by the police in 2023 & 2024, many of the surviving followers are still hiding in the forest to evade authorities and continuing to fast and die. Many who have been rescued, often against their will, and are now residing back in Malindi and Kilifi in their original homes or with relatives, are also continuing to fast and die.

This on-going incident indicates the dangerous power of charismatic evangelical cult missions and the hypnotic hold that they can have on simple local people. The massacre has also rekindled the debate on the regulation of religious worship in the EAC. President Ruto has set up a task force to 'Review the Legal and Regulatory Framework Governing Religious Organisations'.

3. The Baobab Tree

The iconic Baobab tree is found growing throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa, nowhere more so than in East African Community. National Parks such as Ruaha in Tanzania and Amboseli beneath Mt Kilimanjaro in Kenya have magnificent specimens. They are one of the great memories of African wildlife that visitors take home with them. They may grow over 2000 years.

As you drive north from Mombasa towards Malindi in the direction of Somalia along the coast road you pass huge plantations of Sisal plants. Sisal is a tough white fibre which is extracted by machine from the leaves and is used to make ropes, footwear, carpets etc. It is also used in agriculture and mining. The native coastal forest was cleared to make way for the sisal plantations, but wherever a Baobab tree existed they were not cut down. As a result, as you travel up the coast road you see huge Baobab trees growing at intervals high above the sisal.

Why were the Baobab trees preserved by the original planters? Many reasons, but the principal one is probably that the African communities consider the trees have great spiritual symbolism, acting as a link between the spirit world and the physical realm, i.e. the Earth. But baobab fruit also provide food and cooking oil, the bark and wood are used to make thatching for houses, nectar from the flowers attracts hummingbirds and bats, and the bark, which contains much water, is stripped by

elephants at times of drought and the water extracted. It is a most versatile tree, the full story of which is recounted in Rupert Watson's excellent book *The African Baobab*.

The legend of the Baobab tree is amusing. When the Earth was first created the gods decided that the Baobab tree was too arrogant as it stuck itself up above other trees. So, they pulled it out and stuck it in the ground with the roots where the branches should be. As a result, the Baobab is known as 'The Upside-Down Tree'.

In Cambridge the Cambridge Botanic Gardens has a fine young Baobab growing in the glasshouses at the side of the pathway linking each glasshouse. This variety, Grandidier's baobab, originates from Madagascar.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adansonia>



4. Indian House Crows

In coastal Kenya and Tanzania, Indian House Crows are becoming increasingly a problem, so much so that they are disrupting the tourist industry, which is a key part of the economy. They entered the EAC from the Indian subcontinent in the 1890s on trading ships via Zanzibar. Having bred successfully there, they moved on to the mainland.



They are amongst the largest of African birds, with strong beaks. As an alien invasive species they have disrupted the local ecology, killing native birds such as the beautiful weaver birds, waxbills and the marine littoral ecosystem where they kill shore crabs, crustacea and marine worms, and attacking chickens on the poultry farms.

Around hotels and restaurants, they are a menace, being very noisy early in the morning and stealing food from restaurant tables. In many cases a local man is employed with a catapult to deter the crows. They have no natural predators to keep their numbers down. Additionally, there is a real danger around airports of 'bird strike' with the hazards that this would create.

The Indian House Crows are moving inland steadily and have now reached Tsavo National Park and Voi, halfway between the coast and Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. President Ruto has decreed that this year 1 million crows must be killed and has provided the funding for this. A selective poison called Starlicide is being used which only affects crows. Unfortunately, when they are cleared in one area, others soon move down the coast and replace them.

Indian House Crows are intelligent and highly adaptable birds, feeding on seeds, fruits and grains as well as other birds and animals. They cause economic damage which is of concern to countries of the EAC which are further inland, such as Uganda, Ruanda and Burundi as they advance their geographical range.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c999n2nyvwlo>

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