



Chapter 2

Lack of a national ethos

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“Naomba tu nikisema ya kwamba let it be a collective social responsibility tujue ya kwamba nyumba mzuri inaanzia kutoka kwa msingi”. A resident of Meru County.

A nation is founded on a national ethos

24. We lack shared beliefs, ideals and aspirations about what Kenya can become if we all subscribed to a national ethos that builds and reinforces our unity. This report is a historic opportunity for us to begin willingly defining, developing and subscribing to an enduring collective vision that would lead to a united Kenya equal to all its major challenges. It would appreciate and honour excellence in leadership, in the civic practices of citizenship, and in our care and consideration of one another. Such an ethos would be deeply respectful of differences in culture, heritage, beliefs and religions. Its character would guide and constrict the planning and actions of the State to the benefit of the people of Kenya. The journey to developing such a national ethos begins by accepting the desperate need for it. That is the most important recommendation made in this report.
25. The thousands of Kenyans who spoke to the Taskforce, from every social class, all wanted their children, and their children’s children, to prosper, to be safe and respected, and to enjoy equal opportunities and rights like every other Kenyan. Kenyans told the Taskforce of our being a people suspended in a sort of purgatory between our traditional heritage and a vision of Westernisation as a superior form of modernisation to aspire to. ‘Kusema ukweli sisi ni kama tumepotea sana sababu moja ni vile tumekosa zile sheria za mila zetu, desturi zetu’, said a Kenyan to the Taskforce. Many spoke of our suffering from broken historical narratives, a disconnection from our pre-colonial societies, and a sense that together, as African peoples, we are not the equal of others from distant lands. Kenyans yearn for a national ethos of cultural pride, one that allows us to reconcile our traditions with the new and dynamically changing world around us.
26. Kenyan communities have adapted successfully to change throughout history, and they can continue to do so. The country is composed of diverse cultures that for many generations located at their core the development of ethical and honourable people. Our national ethos will emerge from a trusting expansion of our circles of brotherhood such that we regard every Kenyan, and our collective existence as a nation, to be worthy of our commitment and ownership. We will need to have conversations and initiatives that allow us to innovatively combine the young, dynamic and urbanising cultures with the enduring wisdom of our diverse cultures.

27. This is bottom-up work, starting in the family and the community, supported by initiatives that embrace the positive cultures, beliefs and ideals of Kenya's diverse communities and facilitated by civil society, the private sector, and State institutions. It will become embedded in the formal education system, starting from the earliest age and lasting for a lifetime, religious and cultural institutions, the media, and our arts sector. It will not be an ethos made of a single note but will be a complex song of many voices that are inspired by the desire to contribute to, own and build a nation to which we all belong. A Kenya in which a Kenyans' character of embracing hard-work, honesty, integrity, and respectful behaviour will be recognised and rewarded.
28. Even as the Taskforce recommends sustained action to build a national ethos, it is aware that this has been tried in the past with mixed success. Recall the slogans from the past that encapsulated campaigns driven by the State: *Uhuru na Kazi*, *Harambee*, and *Fuata Nyayo*. Without being overly critical, and admittedly with the benefit of hindsight, the Taskforce observed that the behaviour of the State and its leadership was too often at odds with what it was preaching. The slogans became just that — slogans, which were daily contradicted by those who mouthed them loudly on public platforms.
29. Instead, Kenyans must build from the ground up, guided by some of the recommendations made below, but informed by diverse approaches, in every community, sector, or institution. In short, Kenya must undertake a sustained bottom-up and top-down civic, cultural and social initiatives that, at a minimum, transform Kenyans, and particularly the young, into individuals with a respect for others and a readiness to serve and assist others in a way that shows integrity.
30. A major part of strengthening our national ethos is included in the Taskforce's consultations and recommendations on responsibilities and rights. The two should be read together.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

31. **The most crucial national task is to think big and long-term** — Elections will come and go with different administrations in place, but Kenya will endure. We need a vision of the Kenya we want to exist in 3 generations or 100 years. It will be a country that makes a special contribution to humanity, perhaps by being the spark for a resurgence of vibrant, prosperous and confident African civilisations throughout the continent. We must undertake a major consultation, in the form of a national conference, of Kenyans of every age, class, ethnicity, belief, and philosophy with the single aim to produce a vision of a unique Kenyan civilisation 100 years from today. Processes that allow Kenyans to sustain this vision beyond electoral cycles and politics should be supported in academia and think tanks.
32. That vision must stand alongside an **official and inclusive history** — we should give ourselves a definitive, evolving, and inclusive official history.

- A. The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service should be renamed the Official Historian and National Archives Service. The re-energised body should have its mandate broadened to be a pivotal point in collaborative and professional efforts, by libraries, universities, museums and individual historians, to research, analyse and present a thorough and definitive Kenyan history to Kenyans and the world.
 - B. The institution should be led by an established and highly regarded scholar of African history or a world-class expert on library science or curating. It should have a board with representation from the Ministries of Heritage and Education; domestic and foreign universities; domestic and foreign museums of history and heritage; curators; artists; citizens and elders.
 - C. H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta should commission an Official History of Kenya whose production will be led by an Office of the Historian resident in the National Archives. This history should go back 1000 years and provide an accurate and definitive account of the settlement of Kenya by the present inhabitants; the political, economic, and cultural histories of all ethnic groups in Kenya; the role of women throughout this history; an account of the international slave trade and colonialism; the anti-colonial struggles; the post-colonial history of every part of the country; and contemporary histories including those of urban areas and newly formed communities in Kenya.
 - D. Inside the Official Historian and National Archives Service should be a working staff of professional historians, librarians, curators, and professionals from other relevant fields of expertise such as philosophy, anthropology, theology, politics, and the sciences to name a few.
 - E. The work should be connected to the mission of the National Museums, publicly funded, cultural centres, the Ministry of Education and all public bodies undertaking curriculum development, training and education of Kenyans. Its work should be shaped in such a way that it can be presented and understood by all Kenyans, and particularly students and young people.
33. **We must become comfortable in our own African skin** — The Taskforce recommends that Government undertake initiatives that harmonise modern Kenyan identity with our diverse African cultures so that we are Africans comfortable in our skin and not operating between two, or more sometimes contradictory worlds.
- A. Strengthen the Ministry of Culture and Heritage to build and promote cultural policies that are linked to the Counties' promotion of cultural activities. The Ministry should also be able to do more to document, protect, and promote ancient and historical monuments of national importance.

- B. County Governments should be empowered to discharge their Constitutional duty, according to Schedule 4, to promote cultural activities and implement the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Act 2016.
 - C. Replace Boxing Day on 26th December with a National Culture Day for celebrating culture and learning about other Kenyans' cultures (this could also be done on 1st January).
 - D. Link Elders to formal mediation processes recognised by the legal system through training and certification opportunities, and ensure they are well connected with judicial and Government institutions nationwide.
 - E. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage should use public participation and input from experts to codify an official pantheon of Kenyan heroes who reflect Kenya's values and ethos, our fight for democracy and freedom, our aspirations and our outstanding achievements. These heroes should be included in museum displays, curriculums and displays.
 - F. The officially recognised living national heroes should receive State support if they are vulnerable or destitute.
34. **All of us have a responsibility** — Every major sector of the country must take its role and responsibility seriously in building a national ethos out of the country's diverse cultures, interests, and groupings. The following activities, while they do not form a comprehensive list, should be undertaken:
- A. Senior national and political leadership should take the lead in promoting the importance of this national moment for forging a renewed and strengthened national ethos. Our leaders must live what they preach on the national ethos.
 - B. There must be a renewed focus among parents and mentors on teaching morality, including sacred truths whose importance stretches beyond the individual.
 - C. Elders and cultural leaders should commit to strengthening the moral and service ethos passed to the young and including in it a civic component. Insert civic education into traditional and communal rituals for passage into adulthood. There should be a specific effort made to insert the call to service and integrity, as citizens, in all ceremonies of passage into adulthood of Kenya's cultural and religious communities — for example, in circumcision ceremonies.
 - D. The media can build up or tear down. Kenyans need media that hold the powerful to account. Equally, Kenya needs media that uplift us through investing in quality local content. The media should build programming around Kenyan histories and showing us what is exceptional about ourselves.

- E. Kenyans should learn service from the earliest age. In schools, and particularly boarding schools, students should carry out work and exercise responsibilities that demand their effort and service to the community.
 - F. All students should be involved in structured volunteer initiatives that serve the poor and needy beyond the school gates. These initiatives should reflect values of compassion, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility.
 - G. Religious groups, including churches, mosques, and temples, should play a strong role in strengthening the national ethos by mainstreaming ethics training and awareness in their activities.
 - H. The National Government, working with private sector associations, should develop and launch a **National Volunteers Network** that identifies the need for volunteers and gives formal certification for the work done. This should use technology to identify people or organisations with a need for volunteers and link them to willing groups in schools, homes, and workplaces. In schools, it should include adult volunteers and mentors engaging with students. School holidays can be used for students' volunteering work, in environments that are different from where they live or go to school.
 - I. There should be a compulsory curriculum — throughout a Kenyan's formal education — instilling in the learner at an early age, a sense of national ethos rooted in ethics, morals, and integrity. You should not be able to graduate without having completed these courses.
35. **A full-time focus on ethics** — The EACC should be focused on stopping economic crimes and given constitutional protection as a Chapter 15 Commission. Its ethics mandate should be redirected to an Ethics Commission to be under the Office of the President. The NCIC should be subsumed in the Ethics Commission and its mandate brought in line.
- A. Monitor and publicly report on the ethical state of public life throughout the country while providing widespread and accessible ethics and public leadership training.
 - B. The re-mandated body on ethics should advise the President on ethical standards across the whole of public life in Kenya.
 - C. It should monitor and report to the public on the standards of conduct of all public office holders.
 - D. Undertake annual integrity, ethics and efficiency surveys of all Government entities, and the perceptions of Kenyans, and then publicise the results.
 - E. Strengthen the linking of cultural systems of ethics with Kenya's constitutional values.

36. **Link the cultural values and modern norms of Kenyans** as reflected in rites of passage to constitutional values and principles, and the responsibilities and rights of citizenship. This can be achieved through policy guidance from the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and the County Governments implementing measures that encourage and enable all Councils of Elders or community leaders to formalise rites of passage to include both genders, and to incorporate into them national values and citizen rights and responsibilities.
37. **Develop and implement enforcement mechanisms** for the Leadership and Integrity Act that capture and act on breaches. We have lost track of the enforcement of Chapter 6 on National Values and have few working mechanisms. The present focus on financial impropriety, as important as it is, excludes other important breaches of our national values such as bullying, misleading the public, discrimination, and demeaning public office; these may not amount to criminal behaviour but are clearly breaches of the Constitution.