

in sharp focus

With a new constitution in place, Kenya is sprinting ahead with its Vision 2030 plan, writes KERRY DIMMER



Pokot schoolchildren in Western Kenya

Henry Wanyoike, the blind world record

holder of the 5 000m run at the 2000 Sydney Paralympics, is a Kenyan. His famous catchphrase, 'I lost my sight but not my vision' is as apt a phrase for him as it is for his country.

What Kenya needed to come out of its so-called 'lost decade' during the 1990s, was a vision, and this it mapped out five years ago. Called Vision 2030, the plan is to develop the country economically, socially and politically.

For it to shine brightly, however, Kenya has had to dig deep by facing and analysing the mistakes of its past, not least of which are the problem years of 2006/07 when, after corruption scandals of money-laundering, tax evasion and election irregularities, political unrest resulted in a wave of violence throughout the country.

What made those years particularly sad was that prior to 2006 Kenya had for some 45 years maintained stability despite the conflict and crises that was experienced by its neighbouring countries Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania.

Recapturing the essence of calm could only be achieved by the formation of a coalition government which, when it happened in early 2008, resulted in constitutional reform.

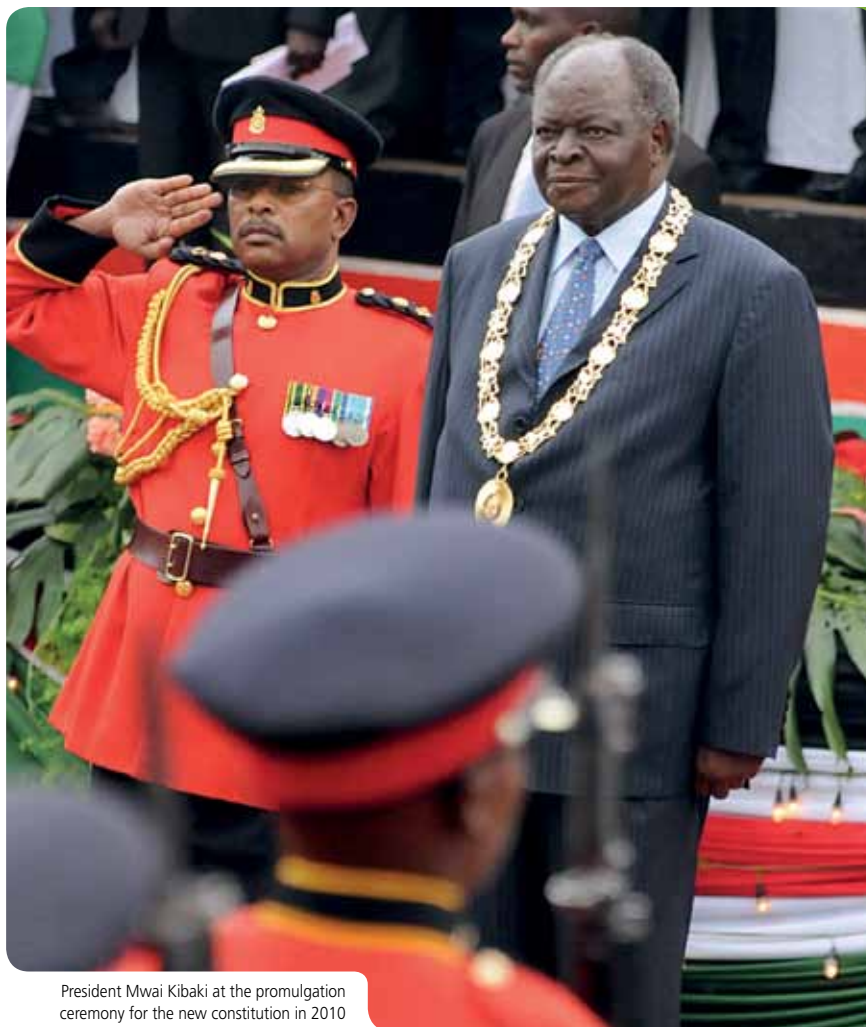
The shared government, headed by President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga, presented its ideas for fundamental change to their people whose 66.9% vote in favour started a five-year process of new legislation.

'When I am asked about the best thing that has happened to Kenya since 1963, I have to say it is the promulgation, last year, of the new constitution.' This is the opinion of Kenya's ambassador to South Africa, Tom Amolo. 'This particular constitution has gone through the mud. It has taken 20 years to talk about it, to debate its merits, to see how the poorest people are given protection.

'We argue that those countries that have not gone through an open and honest review of their constitution, should do so because it enables a country to open up and explore its creative potential, giving it room to breathe.'

Economists say that Kenya's new constitution has had the effect of increasing the country's GDP by one to two percentage points. 'Already,' says Amolo, 'the creative energies of the people are redirected towards making money rather than fighting politics so we anticipate a growth rate, this year, of up to four to five percentage points.'

Next year is an election year and traditionally growth levels out, but in the way the Kenyan



President Mwai Kibaki at the promulgation ceremony for the new constitution in 2010

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constitution is structured, businesses will have a wider berth for growth.

'From where we've come from in 1963 up to now, we have hardly scratched the surface of our economic potential,' says Amolo. 'Vision 2030 addresses this with a drive towards an eight to 10 percentage point growth rate and this can only be achieved – and I quote a friend of mine – by "big-balls development".'

The main bankable projects that will have the greatest impact for the country are tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, financial services and infrastructure. This means Kenya is going to need effective technology and it's now got that with the laying of the first of three under-sea internet cables in 2009.

It puts Kenya into a whole different game; suddenly, it's able to compete with the rest of the world, and it can only get better.

Currently, Kenya is the leading economy in East Africa and is considered to be a regional hub for trade and finance. It helps that it has easy access to various export markets, such as Asia, facilitated by its central coastal position and a relatively efficient deep-water port in Mombasa, soon to be supplemented by the multibillion-dollar development of Lamu Port.

Its road, rail and air linkages are also considered the best in the eastern zone and blueprints exist for further enhancement and new extensions to pipelines, highways, airports and rail networks.

Kenya enjoys a free market economy, has an active stock exchange and is a member of a number of regional organisations inclusive of Comesa (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) and the EAC (East African Community). These relationships are integral



Tea is prepared for export after being blended at the Mbaraki port warehouses in Mombasa, Kenya

to taking advantage of the huge open market of almost a billion East Africans, from both an import and export perspective.

With already well-established relationships in Europe and Asia, Amolo indicates that Kenya will be able to facilitate increased investment in the country by feeding from, and to, the sub-region.

'One of the strategies we have now is to import less and build from within the country to encourage internal consumption, and export more extensively within Eastern Africa, thereby taking advantage of the economies of scale. We want more of the capital goods we import to be manufactured locally.'

Kenya is in a prime position given that, on average, it is just four hours away from anywhere on the continent if travelling by air. 'In three hours you can even reach Dubai, in four, India. Same-day connectivity is the key and this is the brand that Kenya Airways is building.'

Its biggest sector of the economy is that of agriculture which accounts for 25% of Kenya's GDP. Cut flowers, fruit and vegetables, coffee and tea are among the big-sell products. What

Kenya is doing differently than in the past, is allowing the export of branded products. Previously it would bulk its coffee, for example, out of Nairobi.

When it comes to imports, Kenya's largest is seen as a necessary evil – oil. Because of this fossil fuel's unpredictable market prices, the country has begun vigorously addressing its Energy Bill. What you will see in the early planning stages of developing this bill are wind-harnessing projects, biofuel harvests like *Jatropha*, and solar power that will service thousands of acres for enabling crop plantation.

The second largest contributor to GDP is tourism, accounting for 12%. With 40 national parks and reserves Kenya certainly deserves its

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recognition as the 'Kingdom of God'. What many don't know is that Kenya is one of the global leaders in community-based ecotourism that engages with local tribes to develop innovative ways to protect natural resources and local cultures.

This sector is also being rejuvenated by concerted efforts to become Africa's first nation to develop and use international criteria to rate eco-lodges and tour operators through its civil society organisation called Ecotourism Kenya.

'In the 1980s, if you flew across the Masai Mara, you could easily see the criss-crossing tracks from tourism land cruisers,' says Amolo. 'Today, there are certain parts where off-roading is not allowed. This is to protect the corridors that our animals use for mating and to allow us to safeguard the unique biodiversity that exists in our environment.'

But Kenya's biggest investment is in human capital. The right to free primary education is evolving into free secondary schooling and then, it's hoped, into university. 'Kenyans have a great appetite for education,' says Amolo. 'If you don't have a PhD it's better to remain quiet.'



Henry Rono, one of Kenya's most famous athletes, competes at the Commonwealth Games in 1978

CAPITAL CITY

Nairobi

POLITICAL STATUS

Republic

HEAD OF STATE

Mwai Kibaki

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

English, Kiswahili

INFLATION RATE

4.2% (2010 est)

GDP PER CAPITA

US\$1 600 (2010 est)

CURRENCY

Kenyan Shilling

TOTAL AREA

580 367 km²

POPULATION

40.863 million

POPULATION GROWTH RATE

2.46% (2011 est)

LITERACY

85.1%

Kenya instituted laws that ensure all public officers are rigorously investigated and questioned in a public forum prior to being appointed

Henry Rono, the remarkable Kenyan runner who broke four world running records in 81 days during the 1970s, agrees that education is key.

'It is a source of income and of good living,' he says. It's the source of social networking without which we cannot connect to our support structures and the worldwide communities that help us to stay focused. This is what stops holes in pockets and has led me to know who I am.'

But good human capital goes hand in hand with good governance which is why, in early June, Kenya instituted laws that ensure all

NATIONAL PRIDE

In 2010 a study undertaken by Brand Kenya's board to assess perceptions and attitudes towards the country, proved that 67% of Kenyans are proud of their country and thanks must largely go to the enormous number of Kenyan athletes who are the leading brand ambassadors and a source of national pride.

Kenya has the highest concentration of Olympians in the world. The prowess of its running athletes is an international phenomenon, and has gone a long way to putting Kenya on the world map. Names like Kipchoge Keino and Henry Rono set the bar high for those to come. And come they did.

At the Beijing Olympics, Kenya won 14 medals, all in the middle- and long-distance events and it was the nation's best Olympics ever. With the likes of current 800m world record holder David Rudisher, expected to compete in the 2012 London Olympics, Kenya is looking again to earn gold medals.

Of the marathon runners we can expect great things from Emmanuel Mutai, winner of the Mens Elite section of the 2011 London Marathon and, of course, Mary Ketany who broke the world half marathon record.

public officers are rigorously investigated and questioned in a public forum prior to being appointed. 'This is incredibly important to me, and particularly investors, because we are entrenching credible systems to enable Kenyans and those working in the country,' says Amolo.

'It means too that the issues of corruption that have bedevilled the nation, and indeed other parts of the continent, will be in the past. We may never completely eradicate corruption but those in public office will ensure that investors are well protected. Good governance translates into predictability and I believe this is one of the most important aspects of the New Kenya.'

Combine such good governance with Kenya's commitment in human capital, then mesh in the nurturing of, as Amolo calls it, 'the unrestrained entrepreneurial culture that Kenyans are known for', all packaged into one of the most beautiful places in the world, and you have a formula made in heaven. **AD**