Kenya

Kenya lies on the Indian Ocean in eastern Africa. It borders Somalia and Ethiopia in the north, Uganda in the west, and Tanzania in the south and south-west. Lowland plains rise to central Kenya’s fertile highlands and snow-capped mountains. The presence of big game make Kenya’s savannahs a major attraction for international tourists.

Colonial Kenya saw large-scale expropriation of agricultural land for European settlement in what is now the Rift Valley province – mostly land occupied at the time by pastoralists. Some of this land was subsequently settled by people from agriculturalist groups who had been recruited to work on the white farms, later acquiring some land themselves. Pastoralist groups played a less important role in the independence struggle and subsequent settlement.

Arab traders and slavers profoundly influenced East Africa, leading to the creation of comparatively well-educated Swahili-speaking communities in coastal regions as well as the conversion of a quarter of the population to Islam. Declining political influence, combined with the impact of Islamic politics elsewhere, has led to growing resentment among many Kenyan Muslims. Kenyans of South Asian origin have also attracted hostility as a result of their commercial dominance. This has been aggravated by the wish of some Asian Kenyans not to mix socially with African Kenyans, and the overt racism of some.

Pastoralists in the north of the country have long faced government neglect, while Somali pastoralists in the north-east have long been viewed with suspicion if not outright hostility by the authorities due to long-standing disputes between Kenya and Somalia. Kenya shares the concern of other neighbours of Somalia that aspirations to unify Somali populations in a ‘Greater Somalia’ could lead to claims on its territory in the north and east.

As the largest and geographically most central ethnic group in Kenya, Kikuyu had a dominant role in pre-and immediately post-independence politics. By contrast in the late colonial period many pastoralists (who include some Kalenjin tribes and Maasai), among various other peoples-including elements of the Kikuyu-were allied to or co-opted by the British authorities in an attempt to counteract the radical nationalism represented by the Mau Mau insurgency.
Fishing peoples were underrepresented in post-independence Kenya, despite the prominence of some politicians from the fishing Luo people. With little say in discussions of development issues, traditional fishing communities fell into deepening poverty as the government pursued unsustainable fishing policies.

Main languages: Swahili, English, local languages

Main religions: Christianity (Protestant 47.4%, Roman Catholic 23.3%, other Christians 0.19%), Islam (11%), Indigenous beliefs (0.10%), Hindu (0.003%), other religions (0.01%), No Religion (0.02%) Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2009).

Minority groups include: Aweer (Boni) 7,620, Abasuba (139,271), Kuria (260,401), Wilwana (16,803), Nubi (15,4630), Samburu (237,179), Taita (273,519), (Taveta 20,828), Muslims 4.3 million, Luo 4.0 million, Kamba 3.9 million, Kalenjin (a collective term encompassing diverse indigenous peoples including the Kipsigis, Endorois, Tugen, Pokot and Sabaot) 4.97 million (12%), Kisii 2.2 million, Meru 2.2 million, Asians, Europeans and Arabs 350,000 (1%), Somalis 420,000, Ogiek 78,691 (this is disputed by OPDP), Maasai (841,622), Dahalo (2398).

The countries total population is 38.6 million, (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2009)
(For more details visit: http://www.knbs.or.ke/detailed_population_results.php or http://www.knbs.or.ke/censusethnic.php).

Kenya is a country of great ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. Ethnic/national minorities, such as the Nubians and Somalis, are not recognized as such by the Kenyan government and have problems accessing citizenship documents. In recent years political conflict on ethnic lines has increased dramatically, exacerbated by the combination of divisive politicians and economic decline. Nevertheless, ethnic categorizations are complex and sometimes overlapping. Such linguistic minorities as the Terik, Sengwer and Suba are challenged by the near-extinction of their languages. Agriculturalists and pastoralists often have competing claims to land, and nomadic pastoralists are in ceaseless conflict with the authorities, most of whom come from farming tribes. Although the relationship has generally been one of tolerance, divisions between Christians and Muslims are of growing significance.

No ethnic grouping is numerically dominant, and while a few groups have had opportunities at political power with its associated economic benefits, the Kikuyu, who make up 22% of the population, have tended to dominate politics in the post-independence era. Some groups have never held political power. Competition for power and exclusion from it on an ethnic basis has been a major source of tension in Kenya. Particularly vulnerable minorities include Muslims, such nomadic pastoralists as Somalis and Maasai, and such hunter-gatherers as Ogiek and Aweer.
Jomo Kenyatta, the country’s first President, consolidated the Kikuyu position in government and such institutions as the army and police, while also maintaining an ethnic balance in his administration. However, politicians from pastoralist ethnic groups came to exert a significant role within the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU), not least through the growing patronage wielded by Kenyatta’s deputy and successor, Daniel arap Moi – a member of the small Kalejin tribe.

From 1969 to 1991 Kenya was effectively run as a one-party state. Growing international pressure for reform led to the reintroduction of multiparty politics, culminating in presidential and parliamentary elections in December 1992. Daniel arap Moi, president since 1978, won with 36 per cent of the vote over a divided opposition; his KANU party won a narrow majority of seats in Parliament. Multiparty politics increased opportunities for mobilization on ethnic and religious lines. The ‘ethnic card’ as a tool for voter mobilization was then difficult to remove. Politicized ethnicity has usually served narrow groups of officeholders and elites receiving their patronage, while the peoples for whose ethnic interests they campaigned have remained mired in poverty.

Violent conflict in western Kenya between settled agricultural communities of Kikuyu, Luhya and Luo people and pastoralist Kalejin and Maasai has focused on land disputes. Many Kikuyu settled in these regions early in the century, acting as a labour reserve for white farms, though unable formally to own land until the immediate pre-independence period. In the 1990s, according to most independent observers, over 200,000 people, the great majority Kikuyu, were displaced from their homes in the Rift Valley province and other parts of western Kenya. As many as two thousand were killed. Characteristically the perpetrators were organized bands of Kalejin or Maasai ‘warriors’ – young men armed with bows and arrows or machetes, often wearing improvised uniforms – whose activities went unhindered by the authorities. In most cases the authorities conspicuously failed to bring the aggressors to justice. There were also reprisal attacks on Kalejin and Maasai.

The violence began in the period preceding the 1992 election and escalated after it, as did the extent of patronage on ethnic lines. Rampant corruption, a stalling economy, and a loss of international support fuelled resentment against Moi, and he decided not to contest 2002 elections, while at the same time Kenya’s fractured opposition united behind one candidate.

Daniel arap Moi’s 24-year rule and KANU’s four decades in power ended in December 2002 when opposition presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, won a landslide victory over KANU rival Uhuru Kenyatta – Moi’s chosen successor and the son of independence leader Jomo Kenyatta. Kibaki, who had served as Moi’s vice president from 1978 to 1988, promised to tackle corruption, and in 2003 introduced a bill proposing an anti-corruption commission. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) resumed lending to Kenya after a three-year gap. However, in December 2003 the government granted former president Moi immunity from prosecution, and the promised anti-corruption drive had not materialized. Worse, it appeared that Kibaki’s hands-off approach to government was tempting his ministers to follow in Moi’s footsteps. In 2003 Kibaki’s government also launched a crackdown on independent newspapers, a move that shocked Kenyans accustomed to a relatively free media. In February 2005, diplomats
claimed that under Kibaki, corruption had cost Kenya US$1 billion. The Kibaki administration has been roundly criticized for tribalism and cronyism, including accusations that Kibaki has heavily favoured his Mt Kenya region in government appointments.

**2007 election crisis**

Amid widespread allegations of rigging, President Kibaki and his Party of National Unity claimed victory in the closely-fought elections – an outcome vehemently disputed by the opposition Orange Democratic Movement. The fault-lines in Kenyan society were exposed, when competing political interests over-lapped with ethnic differences. President Kibaki and his close associates are Kikuyu, while his main rival Raila Odinga is a Luo. The Luos – making up 12% of the Kenyan population – have long seen themselves as being denied the leadership of the country. Kikuyus making up 21% of the population, have dominated the country politically and economically since independence, and have traditionally been the target of widespread resentment. Alarmingly, post-election anger has mutated into the settling of old scores.

In the Rift Valley, historic grievances against land allocations led to the mass targeting of Kikuyu by the Kalenjin (around 11% of the population), who regard the land in the Rift Valley as theirs. In Western Kenya, the Kikuyu also found itself under attack, with many fleeing for fear of their lives, whilst dozens of Luo in the main Western Kenya town of Kisumu were shot dead by the Kenyan security services, and women – including elderly ones – were raped, again allegedly by security forces. The Kikuyu criminal militia, Mungiki, struck back around the town of Naivasha in the Rift Valley, targeting ethnic groups believed to support the Opposition. The Ogiek – a hunter-gatherer indigenous group – living close to Lake Nakuru, were attacked by gangs of Kikuyus from neighbouring villages, backed up by armed Kikuyu police officers.

In February, under intense international pressure, Kibaki and Odinga agreed to a power-sharing deal, but tumultuous talks on the formation of a joint cabinet lasted into April. The result was the largest cabinet in Kenya’s history – one that nicely served the interests of elites on both sides of the conflict. By the time the power-sharing deal had been struck on the 28th February 2008, bringing together the ODM and the PNU, approximately 1500 Kenyans were killed, over 400,000 displaced and an unknown number of women had been raped. However, deep scars remained among the people of the Rift Valley in particular.

Six Kenyans were charged by ICC in connection with crimes during the election violence of of 2007/8. Four Kenyans are due expected to stand accused for crimes against humanity at The Hague. Interestingly two of the accused are Presidential candidates. The two are also in serious negotiation to contest jointly as running mates. Some Kenyan have gone to High Court to stop the two from contesting citing violation fo Chapter Six of the Constitution on leadership and integrity. Uhuru Kenyatta is from the Kikuyu community and William Ruto from the Nandi (a sub-group of the larger Kalenjin group). Some Western Governments have already sent a warning that should Kenyans elect suspects due to appear at The Hague to the Presidency then it will not be business as usual- Kenya risks isolation by the international community.

**Constitutional reform**
The 20-year-long debate over constitutional reform came to an end with the adoption of the new Constitution in August 2010. Endorsed by 67 per cent of Kenyans, it is expected to bring significant social changes and political and legal reforms, promote democracy help alleviate tribal differences that have brought violence to the country. The Constitution is said to be one of the most progressive in the world with a well elaborated Bill of Rights and a separation of power of the three arms of government. It provides for the devolution of resources and services through county governments. For the first time the Constitution mentions minority and marginalized communities and it contains several articles to promote and protect the rights of these communities. However, time will tell how effectively these provisions will be implemented. The real test of implementation will be the forthcoming general elections scheduled for March, 2013.

Minority based and advocacy organisations

General

Action Aid
Tel: +254 20 425 0000
Email: admin@actionaidafrica.org
Website: www.actionaid.org/kenya

African Indigenous Women’s Organization (AIWO) (Morocco)
Tel: +21 270 333 184
Email: contact@oafa-aiwo.org
Website: http://www.oafa-aiwo.org/

Centre for Minority Rights and Development (CEMIRIDE)
Tel: +254 20-609 682
Email: contact@cemiride.info
Website: http://www.cemiride.info/

Indigenous Fisher Peoples Network (IFP)
National Council of Women in Kenya
Tel: +254 20 224 634

Christian
All Africa Conference of Churches/World Council of Churches
Tel: +254 20 444 1483
Website: http://www.aacc-ceta.org/

Muslim
Muslims for Human Rights (operates as a program of the Kenya Human Rights Commission)
Tel: +254-020-3874998/9
Email: admin@khrc.or.ke
Website: http://www.khrc.or.ke/

Pastoralist
Maasai Education Discovery
Tel: +254 50 23066
Email: info@maasaiducation.org
Website: http://www.maasaieducation.org/
Hunter-Gatherers

Hunter Gatherer Forum (HUGAFO)

Tel: + 254-725-288-402 (contact person Kanyinke Sena)

Email: kanyinke@yahoo.com

Website: http://www.hugafo.org/

Sources and further reading

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Land, livelihoods and identities: Inter-community conflicts in East Africa by Laura A. Young and Korir Sing’Oei. Published by MRG, 2011.

Landmark ruling provides major victory to Kenya’s indigenous Endorois by Lucy Claridge. Published by MRG, 2011.

Alexandra Hughes, PRSPs, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – An Issues Paper. Published by MRG, London 2005. Nyang’ori Ohenjo authored the Chapter on ‘Minorities and Indigenous Peoples Experience in Kenya’s PRS process’ (pp 37-46)


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Muslims


Pastoralists


Hunter-Gatherers