

## ABOUT BUNGE LA MWANANCHI SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Bunge La Mwananchi is an organic grassroots social movement that creates network platform for grassroots Kenyans to participate in democratic expression on pertinent issues affecting their lives with the aim of synergizing their efforts to amplify their voice in the national agenda. The discussions are generally based on social, economical and political issues that affect them directly, locally and internationally.

In Kenya the social movement (BUNGE LA MWANANCHI) concept has grown organically and spread in several towns across the country. The oldest gathering being Jeevanjee Grounds where members meet everyday for more than 15 years now. Amongst the towns that the movement has grown are Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret, Nakuru and Kakamega. The unique thing about the movement is that membership is voluntary and one can participate in actions any time and disengage at will. This has enabled the movement to survive being hijacked by donors or infiltration by state security agents who, apparently are not amused when ordinary citizens have the audacity to take a matter affecting them into their own hands.

The State of Democracy in Kenya is published by Bunge La Mwananchi Social Movement and the article was first presented at the Bomas of Kenya on the 2nd International Day of Democracy, 15th September 2009, convened by United Nations Development Programme .  
For more on Bunge visit [www.bungelamwananchi.org](http://www.bungelamwananchi.org).

# BUNGE LA MWANANCHI SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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## The State of DEMOCRACY In Kenya

*Agenda 4 Reforms and Consolidation of Democracy in Kenya:  
Grassroots participation in the reform process.*

## WHERE TO WITH DEMOCRACY?

### Is Kenya Moving Forward In The Reform Process?

A working definition of democracy is, simply put, “majority rule”. That should mean that all citizens of a democratic country should have their say in everything that affects their lives: politically, economically and socially, among others. That leads one to argue with Simi Kamal<sup>1</sup> that a genuine democracy offers a unifying force and process that can bring groups within a nation together to improve their welfare. In practice, especially in Africa, democracy is commonly viewed as simply the electoral process. However, this is misguided since it limits democracy for one to equate it to the ballot process. Is it any wonder that there is immense pressure that surrounds the electoral process?

Take for example, the debacle of the 2007 general elections in Kenya, the divisive tribal nature of the post poll war that ensued, the politicians’ unilateral decision to share power and thereafter, the formation of a bloated cabinet against the wisdom of the majority. Also consider, despite the record show-up at the ballot box, the mass poverty and inequalities; the high numbers of the landless, the squatters and the ever increasing numbers of internally

displaced persons; the unemployed, our inability to resolve these problems between elections etc. In light of these issues which are some of the Agenda 4 items, is Kenya really then a democracy?

What kind of democracy is Kenya, if it serves the interests of the powerful minority while the areas in which the majority rule is in misfortune and want<sup>2</sup>, and other human rights issues such as food insecurity, poor housing, inaccessible healthcare, poor education, poor sanitation and environment? Realising the popular demand for reforms, there have in the past been government attempts to lead reforms. But these have failed because of political supremacy battles, corruption, lack of political good will and the lack of involvement of grassroots citizens.

While Agenda 4 reform processes of constitutional review, truth, justice and reconciliation process and police and judicial reforms are necessary, if they remain an elite process and do not expressly address grassroots Kenyans’ bread and butter issues, then the Mwananchi will continue to be divorced from this reform processes.



...Supports The Reading Culture...

...let us observe a moment of silence in honour of Kenyans who were brutally murdered by their own government for imagining that Kenya can be a democratic, just and equitable society...

*(Dedication to Kenyan heroes on 9/11)*

missioners and their credibility

- Attend public hearings
- Witnesses in prosecution processes
- Rallying around common issues and lobbying for their prominence
- If necessary, initiate a parallel people-driven process to force the status quo to expedite and rationalise their process

#### 4. *Land reforms:*

- Access, read and input towards the land policy
- Lobby for the adoption and imple-

mentation of the land policy as passed by the cabinet

#### 5. *Corruption:*

- Enjoin as petitioners in court actions highlighting institutionalized corruption such as the private citizens application against the Public Service Commission concerning its constitutionality and seeking to have it scrapped
- Join the court application challenging the illegal re-appointment of Justice Aaron Ringera to the Kenya Anti Corruption Commission

## Conclusion

Grassroots' proactive participation in the reform process is hinged on them seeing how much "bonga" points these processes will bring to alleviation of their long lasting issues, among others, food sovereignty.

Expanding the definition of democracy and creating a grassroots inclusive democratic space are imperative action points.

In the absence of this, the increasingly disenchanted grassroots are more likely to explode in an emancipatory revolution that will be difficult to quash. In this regard, the Government and mainstream Civil Society must find interest in grassroots' point of view on the reform processes.

The donor community must realize that grassroots is organizing outside the traditional structures and review their partnership conditionalities. Further, deliberate measures must be undertaken to guard the reform agenda from being political fodder for political nemesis and from becoming an elite exercise at the expense of the wider citizenry.

There is no doubt that for sustainable democracy, grassroots participation provides a vital link in consolidating and safe guarding democratic values, principles and institutions as well as using their energies to improve their welfare<sup>8</sup>.

Thank you and God bless Kenya!

This article was prepared by the **Bunge La Mwananchi Social Movement** Working Committee

## The Role Of Citizens In The Democratic Governance Reform Processes And Agenda 4 Reforms

Kenya struggles from the effects of bad governance, historical injustices, inequalities, impunity, unaccountable leadership, cronyism, weak public institutions and elite's dictatorship among others. We are a country where our political leadership continues to exploit the electorate's illiteracy, lack of information, political patronage, tribalism, poverty and inadequate grassroots organization to acquire or stay in power.

Unfortunately, the masses have in the past waited for socio-political and economic salvation from the political leadership and did not practice democracy beyond the ballot box. Inadequate political muscle and the dislocation from the grassroots have disadvantaged the mainstream civil society from grappling with the foregoing situation.

### *A case study of Bunge la Mwananchi*

The role of citizens in democratic governance is primarily to be informed and involved- informed about the democratic processes and involved in holding their leaders accountable. Agenda 4 reforms have sweepingly been considered to involve TJRC, Constitutional review, Land reforms and Institutional reforms. While all Kenyan citizens are victims of

bad governance, specific interest groups under Agenda 4, such as the landless, squatters, IDPs<sup>3</sup>, the marginalized, the poor and victims of injustice, must highlight and consolidate their issues in order to fit them within these wider reforms and avoid being sidelined.

Kenyan grassroots, in a new awakening, have begun to organize in order to determine their own political, economic and social structure and to fully participate in all aspects of their lives<sup>4</sup>.

They are doing this outside traditional power structures in spontaneous and "uncoordinated" coming together at the parks, markets, roadsides and community halls, around their common issues, freely talking together, adopting resolutions together and taking fitting actions together. These democratic, self determination and participation characteristics describe the nature of Bunge la Mwananchi<sup>5</sup> (BLM), in spirit and organization.

BLM is attempting to leverage grassroots people's individual passions to create collective action and to put a human face on, amongst others, the impact of ineffective democracy as well

as the agenda 4 reform process and its impact on people's real everyday issues. BLM facilitates grassroots' participation by organizing community forums, wananchi congresses, street talks, distribution of IEC6 materials and networking to push the grassroots issues of unchecked basic commodity price increase, hunger and starvation, irregular evictions, police brutality, water

and electricity rationing, among others, into the national agenda. Other tactics employed include non-violent street protests, letters to the editor, letters to government officials, press statements, signing petitions and capitalizing on ICT7 such as text messaging, website, email publications, blogging and facebooking.

## Impediments to effective grassroots citizen participation in democratic reforms and Agenda 4 reforms

**A**genda 4 reform processes, if handled well, present an opportunity to unify Kenyans across divides while dealing with the apathy, disillusionment and fatalistic attitudes that a majority of Kenyans suffer from. However, grassroots involvement has faced various challenges including:

- The grassroots are not organized and are therefore easily manipulated and frustrated by the status quo.
- The reform agenda is often donor driven and if there is no funding for a particular issue, it will then get sidelined. Where funding is provided the donor's ideologies are often imposed without regard to contextual socio-political challenges.
- There is a low awareness amongst grassroots of what qualify as material, substantive or human rights issues and how to keep leaders accountable in addressing these.

- Grassroots issues are contextual and not homogenous. Therefore, offering umbrella solutions often frustrates and disorients efforts at emancipation.
- The status quo compromises democratic space by employing intimidation tactics on any alternative organisation.
- The challenges of 2012 election interests.
- Rural-urban migration and Nairobi-centred civil society efforts minimise the impact of grassroots organisation
- The flow of information is affected by varying accessibility of communication channels.
- Illiteracy widens the information gap
- Rampant tribalism widens division amongst people with otherwise common issues.
- High poverty levels mean that people would rather concentrate on eking out a

means of livelihood rather than participate in democratic processes.

- Varying interests aggravates class struggles.
- Grassroots efforts are often susceptible to political manipulation.

- Systemic human rights violations and impunity discourages involvement in activism.
- The mainstream media is pro-elite often ignoring grassroots views.

## Opportunities presented by Agenda 4 reforms for citizen participation in the democratic reform processes

**T**he Agenda 4 reform process presents a channel for citizens to spotlight their contextual issues and lobby for effective people-centred policies adopted towards addressing these issues. It is also an opportunity for the civil society and the government to build genuine partnership with the grassroots and to incorporate grassroots pertinent issues in the wider reform agenda.

The civil society and the government can engage with the grassroots without the pressure of donor directives and recommendations. Further, by reading and debating reports generated as part of the Agenda 4 reform process, citizens can get their hands on information that may previously not have been accessible or available.

Armed with such information, grassroots Kenyans can better craft strategies and tactics for pushing their contextual issues into the wider reform agenda.

Practical ways in which citizens can get involved include:

### 1. *Institutional reforms:*

- Keep the debate on police and judicial reform alive in street conversations
- Attend and input towards any public hearings held

### 2. *Constitutional review:*

- Input towards the debates on contentious issues
- Civic education on the referendum document
- Participate in the referendum
- If necessary, initiate a parallel people-driven process to force the status quo to expedite and rationalise their process

### 3. *Truth, Justice and Reconciliation:*

- Get involved in the court process challenging the appointments of com-