

Broken Promises

*The Unraveling of Kenya's Social
Contract in the Ruto Era*

by

Jeffrey Steeves

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Dedicated to all my terrific family: Cindy, Megan, Lauren, Everleigh,
Elliott, Crosby, Beau, Dustin, Dave and the puppies

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Foreword

Written by Lauren Steeves, Jeffrey Steeves' daughter, on behalf of our family

Jeffrey Steeves was an accomplished Political Studies professor from the University of Saskatchewan where he taught for more than 40 years. He specialized in developing-world politics, most notably African studies, with a concentrated focus on Kenyan politics. Throughout his career, his research was published in renowned international academic journals; however, what he was most known for was the extraordinary role he played as a professor in the classroom. From winning the prestigious USask Master Teacher Award to having a tree dedicated to him on campus by his International Studies students, his impact is evident in countless ways. But these examples, along with the influence he continued to have on students and scholars long after retirement, only begin to tell the story.

His teaching style was truly distinct and reflected his remarkable qualities as a compelling storyteller and curious mind, characterized by his tremendous zest for life, patient demeanour, positive attitude, and passion for helping others grow and learn. It was because of his unique approach to teaching, that he was highly regarded by his students, colleagues and peers.

Over the course of four decades, his student evaluations remained consistent – positive, appreciative, and glowing. There were stories from students who were at their lowest low, and he helped them not only pass the course, but inspired them to learn more about Africa and

take more classes from him. Over his colourful career, countless students took an elective course with him only to discover a passion for the subject that led them to change their major to Political Studies.

As many students noted, he was less focused on the curriculum – although important – and more on sharing the stories of his real-world experiences in Africa. He was able to rattle off every lecture from memory, and very rarely used notes, the blackboard, or overhead projector – and definitely, never PowerPoint. As a student, you couldn't miss one of his lectures and expect you could catch up through other means; you simply just had to be there and experience his magic in the classroom firsthand.

His stories were iconic and memorable. From driving to his accommodations in Kenya and suddenly seeing the eyes of a leopard in the pitch-black darkness, hanging from a tree on the front lawn, to discovering that what he thought was a massive road bump on the Kenyan streets was actually a snake sunning itself, his adventures were comprised of the elements of incredible stories. There was the time he talked his way out of an inspection by convincing officials that he knew the President's Chief of Staff. Ultimately, there was the work that mattered beyond the stories – the research that helped transform the tea industry in Africa, bringing more families out of poverty and giving tea farmers the opportunity to truly thrive. His stories were rich and compelling, filled with adventure, humour and humanity. And somehow, no matter how many he told, they always left you longing for more. People could listen to him for hours. In one of our final visits, he told me that his students would often ask him what the point of some of his storytelling was and whether this information was really necessary, and he'd always say, "In order to know where you're going, you need to know where you're from."

To tell you a bit about where my dad came from, it's important to first know that academics didn't necessarily come easily to him from the onset. Instead, it was something he practiced with dedication and focus and worked hard on mastering in his own way. In fact, while early on in his academic studies, someone told him he should settle on being a vacuum salesman, and with great respect, he told that guy to "shove it" and carried on to earn his Ph.D. – one of his many accomplishments that would be a defining moment of his remarkable academic career.

He lived in Toronto, more than twelve thousand kilometres away from Nairobi, yet that distance never dimmed his curiosity or his love for Africa. He spent several years of his life living in Kenya, where he learned firsthand about its culture, politics, and values. He engaged with Africans from the highest ranks in politics, to fellow researchers and academics, to journalists and everyday citizens, from tea farmers and young people, to the person working the newspaper cart, and workers in hospitality. He believed every person he came across could teach him something or offer a valuable perspective, regardless of where they came from, their rank, their education, their gender, their race, or their age. And from every one of those interactions, he was able to bring back those learnings, stories, and viewpoints to Canada and teach others about a country more than halfway across the globe.

To talk about my dad without talking about his love for Africa would be doing him a disservice. Africa – and Kenya in particular – had a piece of his heart. The Kenyan people, African culture and way of life left a lasting imprint on who he was and became an important part of his identity. He held firm the shared values of hard work, family, respecting your elders and community – lending a hand to the underdog and helping others whenever you could.

After he officially established roots in Saskatchewan, he continued to travel to Kenya for countless research trips, including one with his father-in-law, Dan, and one with me in 2014. Our trip together to Africa was such a blessing. Getting to experience my dad in his element, and in what I believe was his homeland, was pure magic. Seeing that world through my dad's eyes is something I'll always cherish. He had such profound respect for the country and such a deep adoration for its people, who, as he would say, "really made the country tick."

The last chapter of my dad's life was a true victory lap. Retirement didn't mean slowing down; he continued to pursue the things he loved the most – his passion for writing, research, and Kenya. And he did it not for the accolades or recognition, but because there was still so much more to say about a country that had captivated his life and fuelled his soul. He did it simply because he loved it, and because he wasn't finished telling his stories. I couldn't be prouder. Not only did he write articles during this time, but he wrote and published his first book, *Democracy Challenged in the 2022 Presidential Succession in Kenya: The African Imperial President*.

Which brings us closer to now.

After finishing his first book, my dad began writing again. What originally started as a journal article quickly evolved, chapter by chapter, into the foundation of a book – the very one you're reading now. He submitted the abstract to Ethics International Press, and they approved it for publication. My dad was elated – not only because he was about to see his second book published, but because it was being published by Ethics International Press. Publishing a book had been a lifelong dream, and to have that dream realized twice was an extraordinary achievement in itself.

But this second book meant even more. He deeply believed in the values of Ethics International Press and admired the work of the scholars they published. To join their ranks was a tremendous honour.

My dad worked diligently and passionately on this book, which focuses on President Ruto's presidency and the evolution that he underwent from being a President for the Hustlers to that of an "Imperial President," marked by corruption. As soon as he started this book, he declared to my family, "That's it, I have to live to at least until 2027," as 2027 marked the next Kenyan election.

And here we are now, in 2026, and it breaks my family's hearts to say that my dad's goal of seeing the next Kenyan election through would not be possible.

My dad passed away peacefully on December 16, 2025, surrounded by so much love, with his family by his side.

He was incredibly strong, courageous, kind, loving, and witty until the absolute very end. And even during his last few weeks in the hospital, our visits and his visits with others were filled with incredible stories from his time and travels to Africa.

My dad finished writing this book at the end of October 2025 and was hospitalized a few weeks later. While the book itself was complete, it still required editing and formatting to get it ready for publication.

My dad's former colleague and friend, Dr. Kalowatie Deonandan, supported this work and helped bring this book to fruition. My family and I are deeply grateful for her time and dedication in helping us share his legacy and words with the world.

Tremendous appreciation and gratitude are also extended to Sarah Palmer and Ben Williams, publishers at Ethics International Press, who were incredibly accommodating, understanding and supportive of the circumstances my family and I were facing. Their patience, flexibility, and willingness to go above and beyond made it possible for these words to reach you. They allowed my dad the opportunity to see his labour of love through and for his legacy to live on with others all over the world.

When reading this book, you may find it less polished or formal than other academic work. The more I reflect on that, the more I believe it's for the best. It's not perfect, but it's distinctly Jeffrey Steeves – full of passion, enthusiasm, curiosity, and a deep love for the country and its people, along with an even stronger desire to help others understand it. And the occasional exclamation mark, too.

Now that you know a bit of where my dad's been, I hope it helps you understand a bit better wherever it is that you're going and wherever these words take you.

With immense gratitude to those who made this book possible, to those who read and cite these pages, and most importantly, to our dad, husband, papa, and friend, for teaching his loved ones where we've been and helping others find their way toward where they're dreaming of going.

Lauren Steeves

Chapter 1

Kenya 2022: The Turn Away from Ethnic Politics to a Policy-Centered Regime

For the first time in the history of Kenyan presidential elections, a successful candidate secured office through a campaign that was explicitly centred on policy issues rather than ethnic mobilization. Traditionally, past presidential elections have featured broad ethnic coalitions bringing together acknowledged ethnic leaders and their communities behind a consensus candidate. Such campaigns seek to mobilize ethnic communities to register in large numbers and then turn out to vote for the designated presidential hopeful. The expectation is that once elected, the president will reward his ethnic titans and their communities. A cabinet post will be given to each titan while appointments as Principal Secretaries or to boards, commissions and public corporations as well as public service jobs will go to supporters within each ethnic community in the coalition. If a leader does not bring significant community support to the winning coalition, then the expected rewards will be diminished appropriately. In contrast, William Ruto and the Kenya Kwanza coalition deliberately eschewed ethnic appeals and instead sought 'a new conversation' in Kenyan politics.

A wide range of issues featured in the Ruto campaign, all aimed at addressing the needs and interests of ordinary citizens, or in Swahili, the wananchi. Kenya Kwanza advanced a transformative policy agenda that became the centrepiece of its presidential campaign. Barely one year into the new Kenya Kwanza government, supporters argued that the 2022 election manifesto had demonstrated significant policy relevance. Kimani Ichung'wah, the Majority leader in the

National Assembly, remarked that, “For the first time in our country a manifesto has not been reduced to a mere campaign document, you have implemented our manifesto and you are continuing to implement it” (KBC Digital News, 2023). Ndindi Nyoro, a rising political star in Central Region in Kenya reiterated, “The destiny of a nation is not dependent on wishes but deliberate policies and programs” (Ibid.). Together, these statements reflected Kenya Kwanza’s effort to portray itself as a government driven by programmatic commitments rather than patronage politics.

This book examines both the policy ambitions and the political consequences of the first term of the Ruto presidency, beginning with his inauguration on September 15. Particular attention is paid not only to the administration’s reform initiatives but also to its policy failures and the political fallout that gradually eroded public support. As criticism intensified, President Ruto responded by broadening his governing coalition while increasingly relying on practices associated with the “Imperial Presidency” to contain dissent. As the chapters that follow demonstrate, issue-based campaigns can generate high public expectations for equitable and effective governance; when those expectations are not met, they may become a source of profound political vulnerability that eventually threatens a government’s survival.

The Kenya Kwanza manifesto was released on June 30, 2022 during an intensely contested presidential race between William Ruto, representing the Kenya Kwanza (KK) and Raila Odinga the candidate of the Azimio la Umoja – One Kenya coalition. Ruto’s bid for the presidency did not emerge suddenly in 2022. Rather, it was the culmination of a carefully constructed political strategy that began very early on in the second term of President Uhuru Kenyatta while Ruto serving as the Deputy President of Kenya. During party

primaries and the actual 2017 election, Ruto had built a solid foundation for his presidential bid in 2022. He attended his Jubilee Party primaries to ensure that his favored candidates received the Jubilee Party nomination. Then, during the election itself, Ruto toured the constituencies of his home Rift Valley region and those in Mt. Kenya and Coastal regions of Kenya to build support for Jubilee Party candidates. As a result, Ruto had strong support among elected MPs from 2017 forward.

In 2018, the opposition leader Raila Odinga moved to reconcile with President Uhuru Kenyatta after having claimed that the 2017 election was stolen from him and after swearing himself in as the People's President at a huge rally in Nairobi in January 2018. Odinga met with Kenyatta in March 2018 and the two adversaries engaged in a public Handshake on the steps of Harambee House at a staged media event. The two agreed to work together to initiate what came to be known as the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) to amend the 2010 Kenya Constitution to ensure greater inclusivity in political representation. Given that Kenyan politics revolves around ethnic-based coalition building at each election, the BBI proposed to increase the executive to include a Prime Minister and two Deputy Prime Ministers. These new posts would be available to bring a more representative group of ethnic titans into power. Much of the period from November 2018 into 2022 was devoted to the BBI campaign seeking the support of the two houses of parliament, a majority of Kenya's 47 county assemblies and ultimately a national referendum. The Kenyan courts however ruled the entire BBI exercise unconstitutional in a series of decisions beginning in 2021 and into 2022. What was clear though was the traditional pattern of ethnic politics was still the route to power from the perspective of the country's political class. President Uhuru Kenyatta sought to manage his succession by seeking ethnic alignments around his preferred presidential successors.

However, William Ruto sought to change that ethnic dynamic by appealing to ordinary Kenyans –the wananchi -to disregard the path set by Kenya’s dynasties and instead support common people referred to as “Hustlers” by Ruto. This duality of dynasties versus hustlers became the basis of Ruto’s early presidential campaign. With the death of BBI, Ruto turned his campaign into an issues-based focus. The very poor, the near poor, small and medium business entrepreneurs, the middle class were all incorporated into a transformative Kenya agenda. This agenda received detailed elaboration in the Kenya Kwanza manifesto. It is to that document that we now turn.

The Kenya Kwanza Plan: The Bottom-Up Transformation Agenda 2022-2027

The plan featured a Foreword by William Ruto in which he identified three core issues facing Kenyans at the ballot box. First, he suggested a clear requirement going forward was to defend the 2010 Kenya Constitution. As he suggested, “For the better part of three years, my opponents subjected us to an absurd process aimed at confusing Kenyans into voting to restore an imperial presidency supported by a court of tribal kingpins who will supervise the judiciary, control the legislature and diminish our bill of rights. Thankfully by the grace of God, the courts ended the circus” (Ruto, 2022). Ruto was adamant that if elected he would empower the judiciary and the criminal justice system. He pledged, “I will want neither the power to persecute my political opponents or the means to shield my allies and friends” (Ruto, 2022). Having continually faced the power of a weaponized State during the 2022 campaign, Ruto was determined not to allow such repression to occur again. His second agenda sought to reassert the rule of law and to uphold the Constitution. Both were viewed as crucial components of a democratic process. The political culture of

the past based on ethnic alignments and tribal chiefs would now give way to a genuine democratic process. His third agenda could not be clearer – jobs. It is here that the stark reality of Kenya as a country mired in poverty became clear. As Ruto argued,

Every year, 800,000 are joining the workforce after completing school, college and university. The corporate sector is only able to employ 50,000 or so. Another 100,000 to 150,000 fortunate ones are able to find stable jobs in successful small businesses. The others, more than half a million, swell the ranks of frustrated young people eking precarious livelihoods as hawkers, casual laborers and subsistence farmers who hardly produce enough to meet their needs. The number of these struggling Kenyans now exceed 10 million, more than half the country's workforce. People are Kenya's most important resource. If, as we intend to, increase the average daily income of the struggling 10 million Kenyans by Sh200 day, this translates to Sh2b a day, Sh730b a year. Where will this income end up? The bulk of it will be spent on the basic consumer goods that keep those who are pouring scorn on wheelbarrow pushers employed (Ruto, 2022).

Before engaging the public on the core policy sectors of a Kenya Kwanza government, a crucial cautionary reality had to be acknowledged. Kenya was facing a major debt crisis. Rising interest rates meant that the fiscal room for government expenditure had narrowed dramatically. Debt servicing interest accounted for Sh1trillion while projected revenue stood at Sh2.1 trillion. In addition, Kenya relied increasingly on food imports which grew from 10 to 17 per cent of total goods imports in the last decade. Put simply, the country was facing a major economic crisis unless food imports could be reduced and government revenue increased substantially.

This explains the first core pillar of the manifesto – agriculture. Two thirds of Kenyans derive their income from agriculture. This sector contributes half of the country's GDP, and it is significant in generating export earnings through such crops as tea, coffee and flowers. The cost of living has increased for Kenyans as maize, a staple, has risen to cost Sh200 per 2 kg bag. Moreover, farmers need to become more productive than at present. According to the manifesto, agriculture would have the quickest turnaround in productivity with the addition of fertilizer, better seeds, and more effective extension services. Food accounts for 60 per cent of household expenditures for the average Kenyan and even more for those who are poor or near poor.

The Kenya Kwanza manifesto was committed to seven major goals with respect to agriculture: 1) provide working capital to farmers through cooperative societies; 2) turn to risk management instruments such as crop and livestock insurance schemes, and commodity market instruments such as forward contracts, futures contracts and price stabilization schemes; 3) transform 2m poor farmers from food deficit to surplus producers; 4) raise productivity of key food chains value for example maize from 8 to 15 bags per acre; 5) reduce dependence on basic food imports by 30 per cent; 6) reform underperforming export crops such as coffee and introduce new ones such as avocado; and, 7) move up tea value chain.

The manifesto was anchored on a “bottom-up” economic development model [BEDM] as against the traditional “top-down” model. To Kenya Kwanza, too many Kenyans have been left behind while struggling to eke out a living at the bottom of the economic pyramid. In the informal sector, Kenyans show energy, inventiveness, and skill at surviving in a challenging environment. However, they lack the access to capital that could drive their small and medium scale

enterprises even further. These are the true Kenyan “hustlers”. They cannot qualify for nor afford bank loans with high interest rates. Policy innovation here could have an immediate impact on the lives of the majority of Kenyan employed and generate a significant increase in economic productivity. The Micro Small and Medium Enterprise economy [MSME] becomes a key pillar in the transformative agenda. The Kenya Kwanza commitment was four-fold: 1) ending the criminalization of work by providing informal traders with access to affordable business licenses; 2) reducing the burden of regressive taxation and over regulation; 3) expanding access to finance by committing Sh50b annually to provide affordable finance to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs); and, 4) strengthening infrastructure and capacity- building, through the establishment of an MSME Building Development Centre in every ward across Kenya’s 47 counties.

The third pillar of the Kenya Kwanza manifesto centered on the provision of affordable housing for every Kenyan. In urban areas, there is an inherent bias toward the provision of high-income housing such that 60 per cent of urban dwellers are forced to live in slums and shanty areas. Kenya Kwanza was committed to providing 250,000 housing units per annum of which 50 per cent will be affordable compared to the meagre 2 per cent at present. This enterprise will be funded through the creation of a National Housing Fund and Cooperative Social Housing Schemes. Affordable mortgages will be made available to low-income Kenyans and as well the number of mortgages will be increased from 30,000 to 1 million. The Jua Kali sector will have their capacity increased to produce housing materials and developers will be given incentives to provide low-cost housing. Kenya Kwanza also anticipated the creation of some 100,000 jobs for young Kenyans in the construction industry.

The fourth pillar of the Kenya Kwanza manifesto is a commitment to Universal Health Care whereby every Kenyan will have access to publicly financed primary health care. The current health coverage under the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) is funded through payroll deductions from the 15 per cent of Kenyans in the formal sector. The remaining Kenyans are not insured. The challenge of enrolling self-employed Kenyans represented the major constraint to universal health coverage. Kenya Kwanza proposed three initiatives to address this challenge. First, using primary health funds for community-based schemes; second, leverage the Hustler Fund to establish occupational schemes for trades, and third, introduce affordable premium financing schemes.

A fifth and final key initiative addressed the introduction of a digital superhighway and creative economy. On this front, Kenya Kwanza would seek nationwide broadband coverage in Kenya. Approximately, 56 per cent of the country was covered already but Kenya Kwanza sought to increase that to 96 per cent. Kenya had already invested heavily in digital infrastructure with 80 per cent of Kenyans already on mobile telephones. The goal here was to reach and allow young Kenyans to find employment in the new digital economy. Kenya Kwanza also sought to move government services into the digital age vowing to provide 80 per cent of government services online.

This ambitious program ran up against the inheritance of a large national debt which limited the government's ability to innovate. The opposition led by the veteran Raila Odinga hammered the government over the high cost of living as the government removed the wide subsidies that kept food prices, gas prices and necessary imports within reason. Also, to reduce the debt load, the government introduced a range of new taxation measures which only drove the

cost of living even higher. Following mass protests led by the Opposition in 2023, a more difficult challenge arose with the young generation, the Gen Z, as they took to social media to demand the end of Ruto and his government. President Ruto re-established the 'Imperial Presidency' to deal with the growing public unrest with his Kenya Kwanza regime.

We will examine the trajectory of politics under William Ruto in the first term of his presidency. The dominant question becomes - can Kenya ever avoid the turn to a dominant executive which entails all the traits of the 'Imperial Presidency'?

Chapter 2

The Kenya Kwanza Government: The Transition Period

The new government began officially on September 15th, 2022, when William Ruto was sworn in as the fifth president of Kenya. A critical component of successful governance is the period of a transition in power. It is important to establish control over the machinery of state as quickly as possible. In the African context, and particularly in Kenya, where the popular expectations surrounding the imperial presidency are so deeply entrenched, the rewards of office must be carefully calibrated. Even though the Kenya Kwanza campaign had been issue-based, the core ethnic communities of support viewed the new presidency as ‘their turn to eat’, to reap the benefits of appointments to government positions. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua advanced this perspective of ‘eating’ by referring to the new government as being similar to a company whose shareholders expect to benefit. Gachagua stated, “This government is a company that has shares invested in this government. You tilled, sowed, put manure, now it is time to reap Those who did not vote for us will also reap but after those who sowed have finished reaping” (Otukho, 2023). Kenya Kwanza supporters were the new shareholders eager to advance their interests. The Deputy President faced immediate criticism from the opposition and civil society for his blunt characterization of supporters as ‘shareholders’. However, the Deputy President countered by suggesting that he is an honest man noting that Kenyans are not used to hearing the truth from their politicians.

The first critical step in the transition focused on the selection of Cabinet Secretaries (CS) to head government ministries. The 2010 Kenya Constitution limits the size of cabinet to 22 members. Given that restriction, William Ruto cautioned his supporters not to be disillusioned if a cabinet slot was not made available to them as there are other opportunities. In the interim, Ruto banned the inherited Cabinet Secretaries from the Kenyatta regime from travelling abroad and placed severe limits on their actions. The Head of the Public Service Joseph Kinyua laid out the limitations on current cabinet secretaries and permanent secretaries, “The Cabinet Secretaries shall not cause any appointments of members of Board Management of State Corporations or State Agencies ... Ministries, State Departments and State Agencies {MDAs} shall not make any new policy pronouncements unless sanctioned by H.E. the President” (People Daily [a], 2022).

A classic example of the reach of the ‘imperial president’ surrounded David Murathe, the former powerful Jubilee Party vice-chairman. Murathe attacked William Ruto unmercifully from 2018 until the August 9th election. Now, he was barred from leaving Kenya at JKIA airport on September 24th, 2022. Murathe was among Kenyans who were alleged to have stolen millions from the medical supplier, KEMSA (Daily Post [a], 2022).

Murathe was not the only Kenyatta power broker to dramatically lose influence and power. Several Cabinet Secretaries had over-stepped their official duties and vigorously campaigned for Kenyatta’s preferred successor, Raila Odinga. To use a Kenyan term, these individuals now were orphaned by Ruto’s victory. A common Kenyan expression which potentially excused their partisanship in favoring Raila Odinga was, ‘orders from above’. They were simply following the dictates of President Kenyatta who was then chair of the Amizio

la Umoja One Kenya Alliance. Fred Matiang'i, the Interior Cabinet Secretary who had inherited the power and duties of Deputy President William Ruto, declared unrepentantly, "We are one and we have talked and agreed that Raila will be our leader. We are united as Nyanza people" (Nyakundi, 2022). The shock of Odinga's loss extended to Cabinet Secretary Peter Munya (Agriculture), ICT Cabinet Secretary Joe Mucheru, Keriako Tobiko CS Environment, Eugene Wamalwa CS Defense and Ukur Yatani CS Finance. Jubilee Party Secretary-General, Raphael Tuju, lost credibility as well. Other pro-Odinga activists included Dr. Karanja Kibicho, the Interior Permanent Secretary and powerful George Kinoti, the Head of the Directorate of Criminal Investigation (DCI). Francis Atwoli, the Secretary-General of COTU had been a vigorous anti-Ruto crusader and pro-Odinga supporter (Ibid). These individuals represented the Deep State which championed Odinga and disparaged William Ruto. All these political activists favoring Odinga were now 'orphans' in the eyes of the new Kenya Kwanza government.

The construction of a Cabinet must be undertaken with great care and consideration. First, the President must reward key, long-term allies. Second, since Kenya Kwanza was a coalition of political parties, it was important to make sure that supportive party leaders were accommodated in cabinet. Third, given that Kenya is a multi-ethnic country divided into major regions, it is important to seek a degree of regional balance. On this point, given the central place of Mt. Kenya in propelling Ruto to the presidency, this region had to be given weight in appointments. Mt. Kenya accounted for 42 per cent of the total votes cast for William Ruto. Fourth, the President must assure gender equity as far as possible in Cabinet construction. Finally, William Ruto must recognize the loyal supporters who stood by him during his trials in the Jubilee Party while under continuous attack by Raphael Tuju and David Murathe, two key Kenyatta sycophants.

More broadly, beyond the construction of Cabinet, the new President must dump all previous Kenyatta appointees. Kenya Kwanza members would be alert to any breach of this requirement.

On Tuesday, September 27th, 2022, President Ruto unveiled his Cabinet nominees two weeks after taking office (Citizen TV, 2022). The first important selection was Musalia Mudavadi as Prime Cabinet Secretary, a powerful new position for a critical ally. As the leader of the Amani National Congress, Mudavadi along with Ford – Kenya leader Moses Wetang’ula assured William Ruto of support in the key Western region. When the two Luhya leaders crossed over to Kenya Kwanza, they were promised one third of appointments if they could deliver 70 per cent of the Western votes. As it turns out, they fell far short of this target. Moreover, it was Wetang’ula who delivered the most Luhya votes to Ruto. Wetang’ula would be given the post of Speaker of the National Assembly. Western region would receive two other Cabinet posts – Susan Wafula in Health and Ababu Namwamba in Sports. Namwamba had been a Chief Administrative Secretary and during the presidential campaign he headed the international relations wing. Three close allies were recognized as well – Aden Duale as Cabinet Secretary Defence, Alice Wahome as Cabinet Secretary Water, Sanitation and Irrigation and Kipchumba Murkomen Cabinet Secretary Roads, Transport and Public Works. Alice Wahome the MP for Kandara was a devoted Ruto ally and outspoken critic of President Uhuru Kenyatta. Typically, it is unheard of for a MP to openly be critical of a President but Wahome took on Kenyatta publicly. On January 2nd, 2021, she stated, “Today, I want to reiterate what I said in January 2020 which has been vindicated: President Uhuru Kenyatta remains the biggest single threat to the Constitution, democracy, devolution and economy in Kenya. He has chosen the destructive path of either his way or the highway” (Africa Press, 2021).

Garissa MP Aden Duale had been purged from house leadership in the National Assembly due to his close association with Ruto. His loyalty to Ruto was rewarded with nomination to cabinet. In an interesting twist, Duale's community had voted in favor of Raila Odinga in the 2022 presidential contest. Another notable nominee was Kithure Kindiki as Cabinet Secretary, Interior and National Administration. Kindiki had been advanced as a possible Deputy President nominee for William Ruto with majority support among Mt. Kenya MPs. Instead, Ruto selected Rigathi Gachagua as his deputy presidential nominee. When Kindiki's community protested vigorously, Ruto declared that he had big plans for Kindiki. As it turns out, Kindiki would go on to become a key Cabinet Secretary in the face of bandit activity, terrorist attacks and Azimio la Umoja - One Kenya Alliance mass protests in 2023. Professor Njuguna Ndung'u, the former Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya was nominated as Cabinet Secretary National Treasury and Planning. Dr. Alfred Mutua, the leader of the affiliate Maendeleo Chap Chap party was nominated for the prestigious post of Cabinet Secretary Foreign Affairs. Moses Kuria, the outgoing Gatundu South MP and the party leader of affiliated party Chama Cha Kazi, was nominated as Cabinet Secretary Trade, Investment and Industry. Kuria had been a vocal critic of Uhuru Kenyatta and influenced Mt. Kenya region in resisting Kenyatta's choice for president, Raila Odinga.

Other Cabinet Secretary nominees included: Aisha Jumwa as Cabinet Secretary Public Service, Gender and Affirmative Action; Soipan Tuya as CS Environment and Forestry; Salim Murvya for CS Mining and Blue Economy; Ezekiel Machogu as CS Education; Mithika Linturi as CS Agriculture; Davis Chirchir as CS Energy and Petroleum; Florence Bore as CS Labour and Social Protection; Simon Chelugui as CS Cooperatives and MSMEs Development; Zecharia Mwangi as CS Lands, Housing and Urban Development; Eliud Owalo as CS

Information, Communications and Digital Economy; Peninah Malonza as CS Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage; and, Rebecca Miano as CS EAC and Regional Development. Salim Mvurya worked tirelessly for Ruto in the Coast region as he had weight politically as the former Governor of Kwale County. Davis Chirchir was the former Energy Cabinet Secretary and the chief executive of Ruto's presidential campaign. Other nominees of note included Justin Mutiri as Attorney General; Mercy Wanjau as Secretary to the Cabinet; Monica Juma as National Security Advisor; and Harriet Chiggai as Women Rights Agency Advisor. Seven women were nominated by the President to be in his Cabinet. All the nominees had to be vetted by the Appointments Committee of the National Assembly and then win the support of the full National Assembly. As it turns out, all Ruto's nominees were confirmed by the National Assembly.

Barely a month into the new Kenya Kwanza regime, the economic reality facing Kenya began to sink in for William Ruto. The high cost of living inherited from the Kenyatta administration, the heavy burden of government subsidies on food and fuel coupled with a crippling national debt required significant policy initiatives. President Ruto did not want to hear criticism on the high cost of living from either opposition leader Raila Odinga or former President Kenyatta. Ruto was blunt, stating, "Our opponents, former competitors, should give us a break ... they should now give us a chance to fix their mess ... They left us with a dilapidated economy, a debt-laden country, a deteriorated security, a police force out to kill the people instead of protecting them" (NTV at One, 2022).

President Ruto told Kenyans, "We will be faithful in the implementation of our plan that will transform our nation in all sectors, in agriculture, in our value addition, our manufacturing,

making sure we will secure our country and making Kenya a country we can be proud” (Ibid.).

In February 2023, the country’s debt picture was dismal with total debt at US\$ 87.4 billion which represented 62.3 per cent of GDP. Forty-nine per cent of Kenya’s debt was owed to foreign interests. In November 2023, Kenya’s debt stood at KSh 10.58 trillion according to a Kenya National Bureau of Statistics report. The Kenya economy grew at the rate of 5.4 per cent in the second quarter of 2023 with support of the financial sector which grew at 13.5 per cent and agriculture which showed renewed strength at 7.7 per cent (KNBS, 2023). Speaking at the celebration of the one-year anniversary of the Hustlers’ Fund, President Ruto was blunt on his inheritance in coming to power, “Our main problem was the debt, and many people thought Kenya will end up like many other countries that are running into default. I want to assure Kenyans that we have stabilized the economy and we are ready and committed to pay all our debts” (KBC [a], 2023)).

Now, in November 2023, President Ruto was celebrating, declaring: “Let me tell the great people of Kenya that the challenges we had a year ago put the country in debt distress ... I can comfortably say that Kenya is now on a sound footing and trajectory. We can assure that we can respect all our commitments, all our debts so that we can get our country moving” (KBC, [a], 2023).

In his first State of the Nation address, President Ruto had declared, “Our efforts have yielded such progress that next month we will settle the \$300 million (KSh 44.96 billion) instalment of the \$2 billion (KSh 306.4 billion) Eurobond debt that falls due next year” (State of the Nation, 2023). By November 30th, the President was able to declare, “... the cost of living is to drop by December 2023” (Citizen TV [b]. 2023).

A key element of the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation model was the early commitment of the Kenya Kwanza government to the creation of the Financial Inclusion Fund or more popularly known as the Hustler Fund. In November 2022, President Ruto declared that, “The core objective of the fund is to offer holistic financial solutions targeting people at the bottom of the pyramid” (KBC [b], 2023). Eighty per cent of the workforce is in the informal sector where Hustlers contribute 33 per cent of GDP. During the election campaign, Ruto suggested that the money lent out to Kenyan entrepreneurs would be interest free. However, once in power, President Ruto declared that borrowers would be required to pay a reasonable annual rate of interest on their loans. The Fund was meant to provide credit to micro, small and medium scale business owners who were unable to secure credit from the banks due to 7 million Kenyans having poor credit ratings by the Credit Rating Bureau (CRB). President Ruto declared, “These people were condemned not because of anything they did wrong but because of financial difficulties ... We have given them a product today through the Hustler Fund that allows them to repair their credit” (Citizen TV [c], 2023). Each participant would begin with a small loan of KSh. 500 and pay that amount back with interest. Then, the individual would have access to an escalating loan amount having established their creditworthiness. The loan amounts varied from KSh.500 to KSh.50,000 with an interest rate of 8 per cent per annum. If a Kenyan drew on the Fund 10 times, they would be eligible for a loan of 100 per cent; if between 8 to 10 times, then access to 60 per cent; if between 2 to 5 times, then 40 per cent; only once, then one could withdraw up to 30 per cent. At the one-year anniversary of the launch of the Hustler Fund, there were 7.7 million active members. The fund had disbursed KSh 39.5 billion to 21.7 million beneficiaries with KSh 28.78 billion repaid and savings accounting for KSh 2 billion. President Ruto declared, “the Hustler Fund has become self-sufficient” (ibid.). Any Kenyan can access the Fund by cell phone as

there were 1,450 country-wide ICT hubs. The Fund was also referred to as the Magical Fund.

A core problem facing the economy was the practice under Uhuru Kenyatta of heavily subsidizing maize, rice, fuel and electricity. Maize and rice were heavily dependent on imports rather than Kenyan production. To finance these subsidies and the recurrent expenditures of government, Kenyatta borrowed heavily abroad from traditional banking sources. The result was that Kenya faced high interest charges on the loans and bonds used to finance the subsidies. The Kenya Kwanza government under the advice of David Ndii, Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, took two options. First, tax revenue had to be increased dramatically. This meant going after wealthy Kenyans who had been privileged to have a tax-exempt status including the wealthiest families, the Moi's and the Kenyatta's. In the first three months, the KRA was given clear targets to meet,

The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) missed its revenue collection targets by Sh 27 billion in the three months to December amidst William Ruto's aggressive push to weed out tax evaders and boost receipts. Tax collections from five major streams – payroll, corporation, VAT, excise and import duty – in the three months to December amounted to Sh 466.46 billion against a target of Sh 493.11 billion. Other revenues included investment, fines, levies and forfeitures trailed its target by Sh 16 billion with a collection of Sh 33.10 billion in the quarter. The Treasury plans to increase tax collection by Sh 274.1 billion, or 14.29 per cent, to Sh 2.19 trillion in the current fiscal year ending June and cut borrowing (Staff [c], 2023).

For the fiscal year 2022/23, the KRA collected KSh. 2.166 trillion up 6.7 per cent from fiscal year 2021/22 (Republic of Kenya [a], 2023). What

was striking was the expansion of the tax base as 940,483 active taxpayers were added during the fiscal year (Ibid.).

On the borrowing side, Ndii suggested that the government turned to domestic sources of revenue generation through Treasury Bills. According to Ndii, “The government borrows at 8 per cent so it is just passing on the borrowing cost to the people ... Every Thursday we borrow 25 billion shillings default Treasury bill options, we brought it down from what Jubilee had, KSh. 650 billion” (Rono, 2023).

The second major path chosen by Kenya Kwanza was to substitute high-cost private bank and bond sources of finance with low interest, long-term concessional loans from the IMF and the World Bank. The high subsidy policies on food and fuel imports had to be abandoned. Inevitably, the cost of living would increase leading to a substantial political cost.

One counter-reaction to removing State subsidies was the decision by the new administration to reduce the cost of fertilizers from over KSh 7,000 per 100 kg bag to KSh 2,500 to encourage farmers to begin to invest in increasing production. The goal was to make Kenya self-sufficient in maize production. Only then could the price of maize flour be brought under control. Each bag cost 240 to 250 shillings in January – February 2023. With the effects on productivity by the fertilizer scheme, the maize harvest following the short rains increased dramatically. The Kenya Kwanza government also distributed hundreds of air driers to allow farmers to dry their harvests of maize. By November 2023, the effects of the fertilizer scheme began to be felt. The price of a two kilogram bag of maize flour had dropped to between 170 to 139 shillings. With the more general economic turnaround, President Ruto predicted that the cost of living would be reduced significantly by the end of December 2023.

Francis Atwoli, the secretary-general of COTU appealed to Kenyans to give President Ruto time to make the economy right. Atwoli declared, "People are crying about the cost of living. Some are complaining that we voted for William Ruto ... We must accept for him to implement his government" (Khaemba, 2023). President Ruto was equally assertive on the government's achievements: We all agreed to adequately address the cost of living. It is one of the big tickets upon which we spoke, conversed and campaigned ... Today, I can stand on this podium and say that, at a time like this last year, the cost of unga was KSh 240. As I speak, the price dropped to between KSh 140 and KSh 130. And this is the truth! (KBC [b], 2023).

The third major policy commitment in the Kenya Kwanza manifesto focused on the provision of affordable housing for every Kenyan. Part of this commitment hinged on the Kenya government providing free land to private sector developers with a commitment from them to build affordable housing units. Typically, in the past new housing estates had their units bought by wealthy Kenyans who then turned around to rent the units at whatever rents the market would bear. Essentially, the units in these estates were well beyond the reach of most Kenyans and the ensuing rents could only be met by middle-income Kenyans. Low income and poor Kenyans had no hope whatsoever of accessing these housing estates. This explains the overwhelming reliance by low-income and poor Kenyans to find housing in the shanty/slum areas like Kibera in Nairobi. Even here, the shacks are owned by middle and high-income Kenyans who turn a profit on renting them out to the poor. These shacks are substandard, lack any facilities - no water, electricity or toilets. Even though some upgrading has been achieved in settlements like Kibera, living conditions remain marginal. A high proportion of meagre income goes to rent. Also, children lack access to quality schooling. In Dagoretti settlement, for example, informal schools prevail. Classes