



Elections 2022: Mt Kenya Foundation Remains Mum

By Dauti Kahura



As the presidential campaign gets into high gear and with only 48 days to the general election, a key plank of Raila Odinga's support group has been very quiet and less and less visible from the public.

For the better part of 2021, the Mt Kenya Foundation (MKF) was very much in the limelight, meeting with the Azimio alliance presidential candidate in carefully choreographed business bashes, cocktail parties, prayer meetings and even in public rallies. Come 2022 and the meetings have gradually petered out.

Or, let's put this way: their soirées are no longer being reported by the mainstream media, including their "in-house" media house, the Royal Media Services (RMS) owned by media mogul S.K. Macharia, one of the foundation's members.

Two weeks ago, I had a lengthy discussion with one of their members, who told me that nothing has changed. "Our position and support hasn't changed; Raila is still our preferred choice. We only decided to continue lending our support away from the public glare."

The foundation still funds some of his presidential campaigns, albeit discreetly. "Our people [Gikuyu, Meru, Embu Association GEMA] were not, and are not, enthused by our [open] support for Raila. We were getting a lot of flak from them and we reckoned it wasn't helping his and our cause. Nothing

will sway GEMA from not voting for Raila. That's the brutal fact."

It's not only MKF that has stopped declaring their support for Raila publicly. The Council of Elders, which in October 2020 made a hyped trip to Bondo, the ancestral home of the Odinga family in Siaya County, have equally gone mute. "After that trip, the [Kikuyu] people shunned our activities and seemingly avoided us," one of the elders told me recently. "They didn't take well to our partisan and public support of Raila."

The MKF, which was formed in 2007, comprises among others, captains of industry, very senior and influential civil servants, and powerful politicians. The year 2007 was a critical juncture in the politics of Kenya: President Mwai Kibaki, who died in April 2022, was going to face Raila in the coming December presidential elections.

Although Raila had helped Kibaki clinch the presidential seat in the crucial 2002 general elections, against the greenhorn duo of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, by the end of his first term Kibaki had become Raila's nemesis. Under the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) banner, Raila had already sent shivers down Kibaki's party ranks that in 2007 elections ODM was ready to wrestle power from him.

It is against this backdrop that some of the richest among the GEMA fraternity coalesced around the MKF. Basically, it was a platform for raising campaign money for Kibaki's second term. Not ready to witness another change of the rear guard just when they had begun consolidating their riches, after a 24-year hiatus during President Daniel arap Moi's reign, this ethnic group was not about to take any chances.

Raila mounted a formidable if disorganised campaign. But just as he was on the cusp of wresting power from Kibaki, who was now running under the Party of National Unity (PNU), a new party that had been quickly cobbled together, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) —precursor to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC)—started relaying startling results.

What the end result of this "startling results" heralded for Kenya is now in the history books: post-election violence (PEV), over 600,000 internally displaced people (IDPs), unmitigated deaths officially put at 1,000 by the state, but recorded figure by non-governmental organisation (NGOs) placed the numbers at three times as much.

The MKF is not an entirely new invention—in 1996, some of the richest Kikuyus from Central Kenya came together to form the Central Province Development Support Group (CPDSG) in anticipation of the GEMA-KAMATUSA (Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana, Samburu) peace talks. The supposedly "peace group" was formed presumably to stem (ethnic and post-election) tensions that first occurred after the first multiparty elections in 1992.

The talks were also supposed to culminate in the re-settling of the victims of the so-called tribal violence that had erupted in the expansive Rift Valley Province and which mostly affected the Kikuyu people. The reality is that this elite cabal that was again composed of influential civil servants, rich business people and powerful politicians was an informal lobby group that sought to campaign for the hated ruling party KANU and for President Moi in Central Province.

Then, as now, one of the constant figures in these formations has been S.K. Macharia; he belonged to the CPDSG just as he now belongs to the MKF. As with the CPDSG then, the MKF is a lobby group primarily concerned with the survival of its business interests.

William Kabogo, the first governor of Kiambu County who is seeking to reclaim his seat in 2022, wrote on his twitter handle: "If you care to know Mt Kenya Foundation specializes on fundraising

but the big question is do the funds go to the intended purpose? Your guess is as good as mine. Caveat emptor.”

Among the MKF membership is Mutuma Nkanata, the foundation’s coordinator who is also the CEO of the NGO Coordination Board—the regulatory board for NGOs in Kenya. He is also the Chairman of Kirimara Sports; a Meru-based sports development organisation.

Another member is the former Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) boss Michael Waweru. Waweru was appointed commissioner-general of KRA in 2003 by Kibaki. His contract ended in 2012. An accountant by profession, he was the managing partner at Ernst & Young (EY) - East Africa until 2002.

Also in MKF is Peter Munga, founding chairman of Equity Bank group and one of its largest shareholders. Munga is also a shareholder at Britam, the financial services conglomerate, and a founder of the Pioneer Group of Schools.

MKF member Titus Ibui is the chairman of Lamu Port South Sudan, Ethiopia, Transport Corridor Development Authority (LAPSSET), a regional infrastructure partnership between Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. Ibui is also the vice chairman of Kenya Leather Council and founder and executive director of Bell Industries Ltd., an agri-business and health solutions company.

Zamara Group chairman, politician and former MP Dennis Waweru is also an MKF member, as is businessman Wilfred Murungi, owner of Mastermind Tobacco Kenya (MTK).

During one of the Raila meetings organised by MKF on 28 September 2021, communications director Joe Murimi said, “The Tuesday (September) meeting between MKF and Mr Odinga is also with a view to coordinating resource allocation and setting priorities for the region’s economic turn-around ahead of 2022. We’re listening to all presidential contenders and our interests as a region are way bigger than only the position of a deputy president.” The foundation had previously met with Raila in June 2022.

Some of the personalities in the June meeting included President Uhuru’s influential maternal uncle, former Catholic priest George Muhoho, Media mogul Macharia and former Kenya Chamber of Commerce vice chairman, James Mureu.

At the meeting, Macharia claimed that it was President Uhuru Kenyatta who made overtures to Raila Odinga. “I’m saying that handshake, we ask him (Uhuru) to leave it in good hands so that it can continue. We believe President Uhuru will leave this country in good hands, the hands he went looking for.”

At that meeting Nyandarua County governor Francis Kimemia confessed that the Kikuyu political class had peddled falsehoods against Raila. “Our work was to tarnish Raila’s name, but now we must change that narrative and tell our people that that was politics then. He asked the class to help undo the lies.”

Two months ago, in April 2022, campaigning in his own Nyandarua County, Kimemia changed his tune, insinuating that President Uhuru had not kept his promise on developments projects in Nyandarua. I called my friend Njenga from Rurii location, to find out what was going on with governor Kimemia. “Kimemia was told by the people in no uncertain terms that campaigning for Azimio would take him nowhere, so he got the drift, changed tune and started bashing President Uhuru.”

As MKF makes a tactical retreat in its support for Azimio, it is not only Kimemia who has changed his tune; many of the politicians from the Azimio camp seeking elective posts in Mt Kenya are

careful not to mention Azimio or even Raila's name in their campaign rallies.

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