



ROUTE
TO FOOD

THE BLIND SPOT

CHA KULA MAGAZINE SPECIAL EDITION



A Graphic Novel by Route to Food Initiative

Written and Illustrated by Chief Nyamweya

THE BLIND SPOT

February 2023

Editorial

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”.

Albert Einstein

Around the world, hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition are on the rise. According to the 2022 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report, 828 million people were affected by hunger in 2021. This is an increase of approximately 46 million people since 2020 and 150 million people since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another quarter of the world's population suffers from various forms of malnutrition, including obesity, with huge negative effects on health.

In Kenya, despite the political prominence that food security has gained since the promulgation of the Constitution in 2010 which explicitly recognizes the Right to Food, statistics confirm that the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity is as high as 69% of the total population - more than 37 million Kenyans. Over 80% of the population cannot afford a healthy diet, which has particularly negative nutritional consequences for women and children.

The situation is unlikely to change because efforts to address the situation focus mainly on the large-scale production of a few staple crops, with too little attention paid to the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. These include poverty, gross power imbalances between small-scale and industrial producers, poor governance, over-reliance on global value chains, marginalization of local production, lack of productive or financial resources, and recurrent food price volatility.

In addition, policy discussions on food security between governments, agri-business, manufacturers, large farm owners and the private sector remains focused on the need to “modernize” the agricultural sector. That is, supporting the expansion of industrialized food production rather than transformation towards sustainable alternatives, like agroecology.

This inequitable model of agriculture fails to disrupt powerful economic interests and primarily benefits the political and wealthy classes of Kenyan society. It also undermines the need for explicit decentralized policies and programs aimed at improving small farmer livelihoods and protecting the needs of the most vulnerable, thereby laying the foundation for a meaningful and socially inclusive development path.

As suggested by the opening quote of this editorial, these extraordinary challenges call for extraordinary responses. That is why the Route to Food Initiative has taken the bold step to publish this special edition of the Cha Kula magazine as a graphic novel and political commentary on food and hunger in Kenya.

The Blind Spot brings to life different ways that politics and power play out in Kenya's food system in the form of a visually compelling political drama set in a fictional future county in Kenya. It's main protagonist Sifa, a passionate young professor from the city, travels back to her hometown of Kajibora following the death of her grandfather - a renowned politician and leader of a famous farmer revolution. Upon her return, Sifa finds that the post-revolutionary county is being taken over by a multinational industrial agribusiness company.

Through this visual narrative, we hope to harness the power of storytelling to highlight how food is a deeply political issue and most importantly, spark a conversation around how power dynamics influence our global and local food systems and ultimately, our ability to progressively realize the Right to Food for all.

The graphic novel carefully demonstrates various themes including the disenfranchisement of smallholder producers; the influence of the private sector on government processes and policymaking; the erosion of food, seed and farmer sovereignty; continuous undermining of human rights; the need for political accountability and, the impacts of industrial agriculture on environmental justice, health and ecosystems. The unequal position, yet significant potential of women to lead food systems transformation is also portrayed in the strength and aspirations of two of the novel's main characters, Sifa and Dalili.

Through this special edition of Cha Kula, we invite you to consider agroecological alternatives as a solution to chronic food insecurity and, to be a champion for the realization of the Right to Food in Kenya.

Tunatumani utafarahia chapisho hili la gazeti la Cha Kula.

Glossary



Agroecology

Agroecology has established itself in the scientific and political debate as a wholistic concept to ensure food security, maintain healthy ecosystems and support livelihoods in the context of climate change and declining biodiversity. It can be understood as a scientific discipline, a set of farming practices and a social movement.



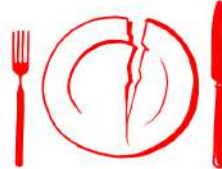
Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), GMOs, can be defined as organisms (i.e. plants, animals or microorganisms) in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally.



Food Politics

Food is a highly political issue. Our choices and preferences and what we eat are all shaped by: availability, culture, global economic structures, tradition, wealth and even trade and foreign investments. These, and many more factors, ultimately avail or restrict food choices.



Hunger

Hunger is an uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient consumption of dietary energy. It becomes chronic when the person does not consume a sufficient amount of calories (dietary energy) on a regular basis to lead a normal, active and healthy life.



Food Security

Food security exists when all people at individual, household, national, regional and global level have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious foods that meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.



Right to Food

Every person has the right to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality.

Constitution of Kenya 2010, Chapter 4, Article 43 (1) c.



Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.



Traditional Knowledge

This refers to the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world. Developed from experience gained over the centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment.

JANUARY 2022, KAJIBORA COUNTY HALL, 10:31 AM.

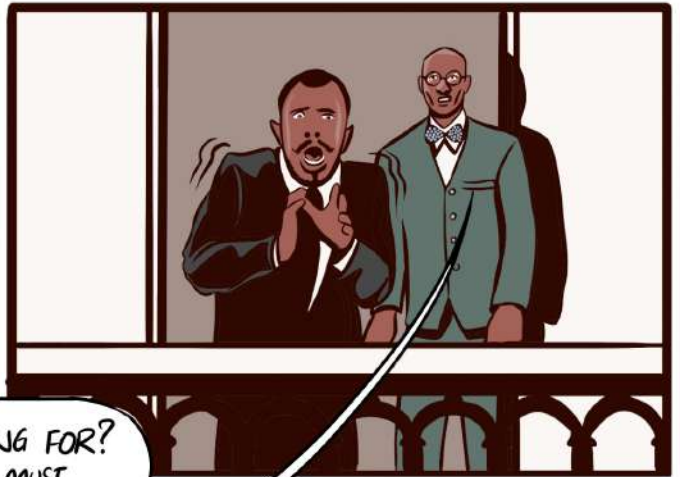
A GIGANTIC CROWD OF FARMERS AND KAJIBORA RESIDENTS DESCENDS UPON THE COUNTY GOVERNOR'S OFFICES DEMANDING JUSTICE FOR THE DEATH BY SUICIDE OF A FARMER NAMED KARISA. NEWS OF HIS SUICIDE WENT VIRAL ON THE INTERNET WITHIN HOURS. KARISA'S LAND WAS SOLD BY AUCTIONEERS AFTER HE FAILED TO PAY AN ONEROUS DEBT FOR THE PURCHASE OF PESTICIDES, FERTILIZER AND SEEDS.

IN ADDITION TO STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH KAJIBORA FARMERS, THE ANGRY PROTESTORS - LED BY A FIREBRAND ORATOR, MZEE MAONA - DEMAND LOWER PRICES ON FOOD, BETTER QUALITY FOOD AND ENHANCED PROTECTION OF KENYA'S ECOSYSTEMS, LAND REFORMS AND MORE... THEY ESCORT KARISA'S COFFIN ON THE BACK OF MZEE'S TRACTOR TO CONFRONT THE INFAMOUS GOVERNOR NYONI. THEY HOLD HIM RESPONSIBLE FOR ALLOWING MULTINATIONALS TO REIGN FREE IN KAJIBORA COUNTY, WHILE OFFERING UNSUSTAINABLE, INDUSTRIAL, CHEMICAL-INTENSIVE SOLUTIONS TO "ADDRESS" CHRONIC FOOD INSECURITY.



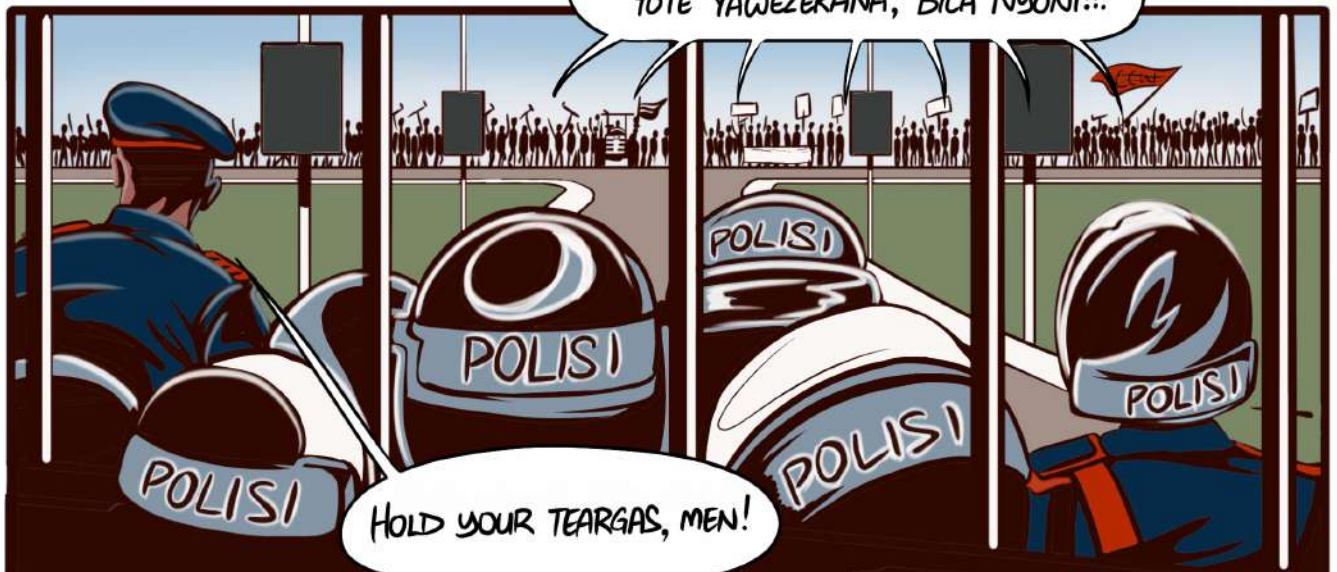


WHAT THE HELL ARE THE POLICE WAITING FOR?
THIS IS A CLEAR CASE OF TRESPASS! THEY MUST
OPEN FIRE BEFORE THESE RIOTERS GET IN!

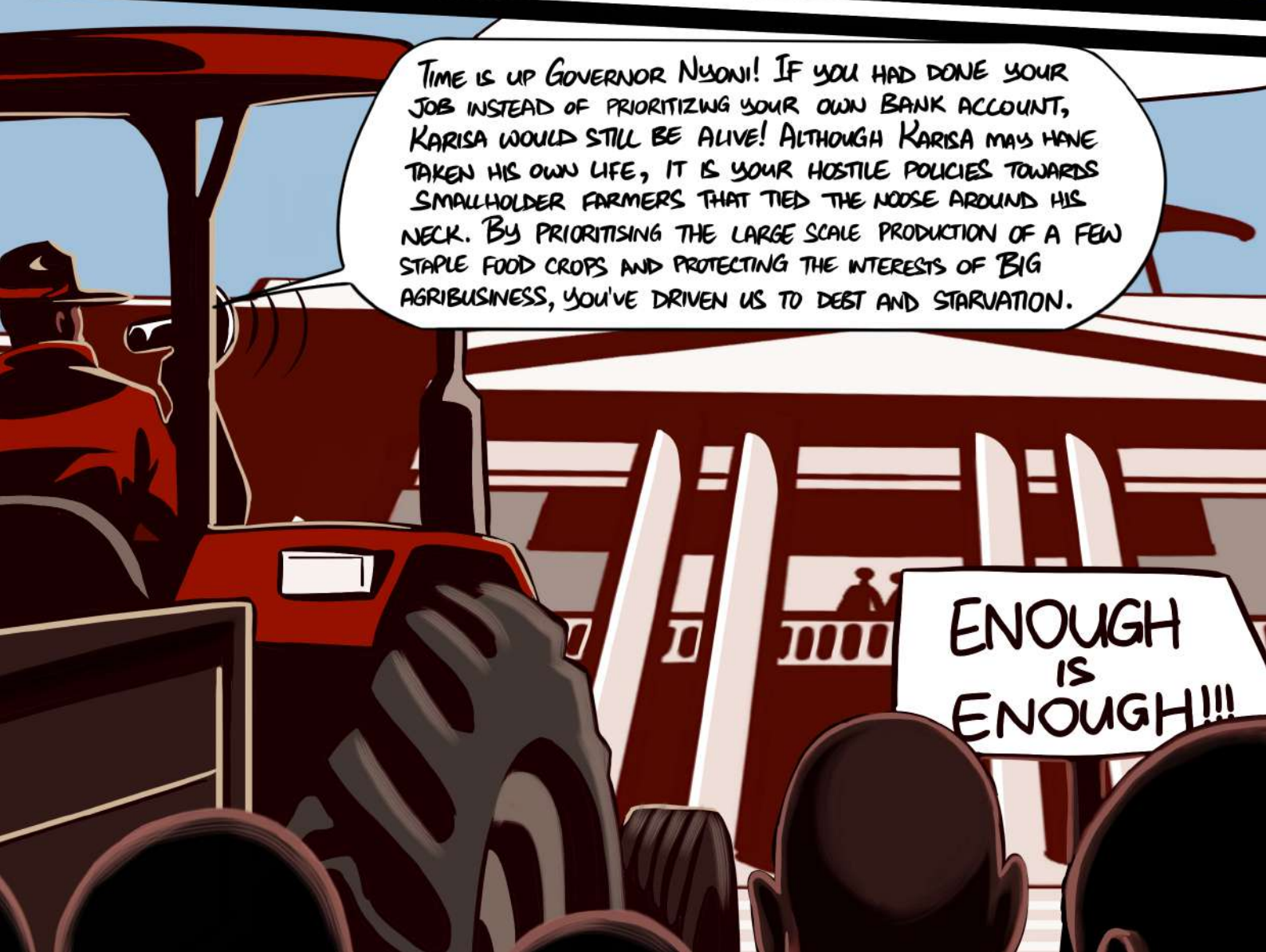


I'M AFRAID THEY'RE DISOBEYING
YOUR ORDERS, SIR. THEY SAY THEIR
FAMILIES ARE AMONG THE RIOTERS...

YOTE YAWEZEKANA, BILA NYONI!!!
YOTE YAWEZEKANA, BILA NYONI!!!



HOLD YOUR TEARGAS, MEN!







AMONG THE MOURNERS THAT FILE INTO THE FUNERAL CHAPEL TO PAY THEIR LAST RESPECTS IS MZEE'S GRANDDAUGHTER, SIFA.



20 YEARS AGO, MZEE AND THE CHAMA CHA WAKULIMA PARTY TOOK KATIBORA OUT OF POVERTY, AND TURNED IT INTO THE AGRICULTURAL EXPORT CAPITAL OF THIS COUNTRY!

TODAY, MILLIONS OF DOLLARS ARE FLOWING INTO KATIBORA THANKS TO MZEE'S FEARLESS CHALLENGE OF THE HATED NYONI REGIME. THAT'S WHY WE AS CCW MUST CONTINUE TO DEFEND SMALL FARMERS AND SPEARHEAD LAND REFORM!



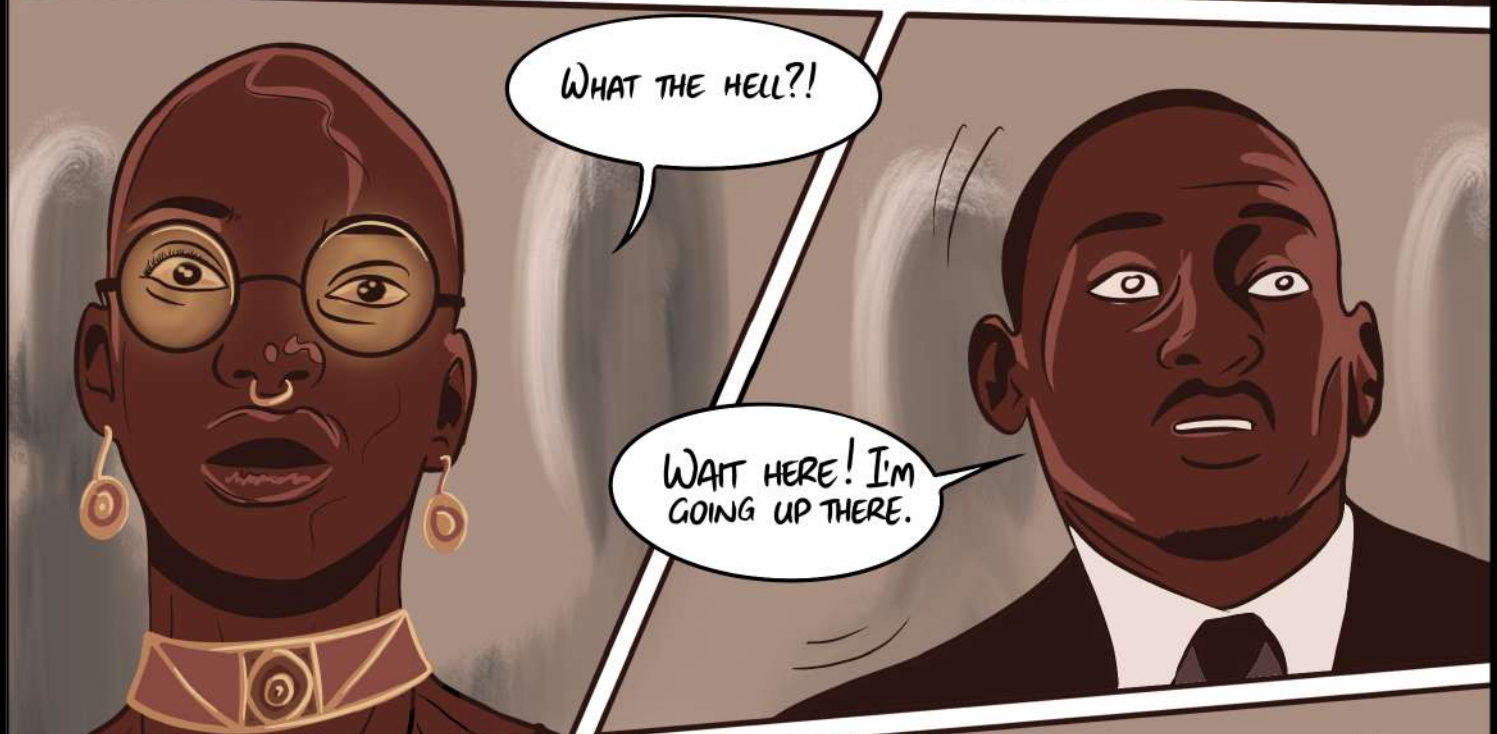
THAT IS WHY AS YOUR NEXT GOVERNOR, I WILL PROCURE A THOUSAND NEW TRACTORS FOR OUR FARMERS IN MY FIRST HUNDRED DAYS!

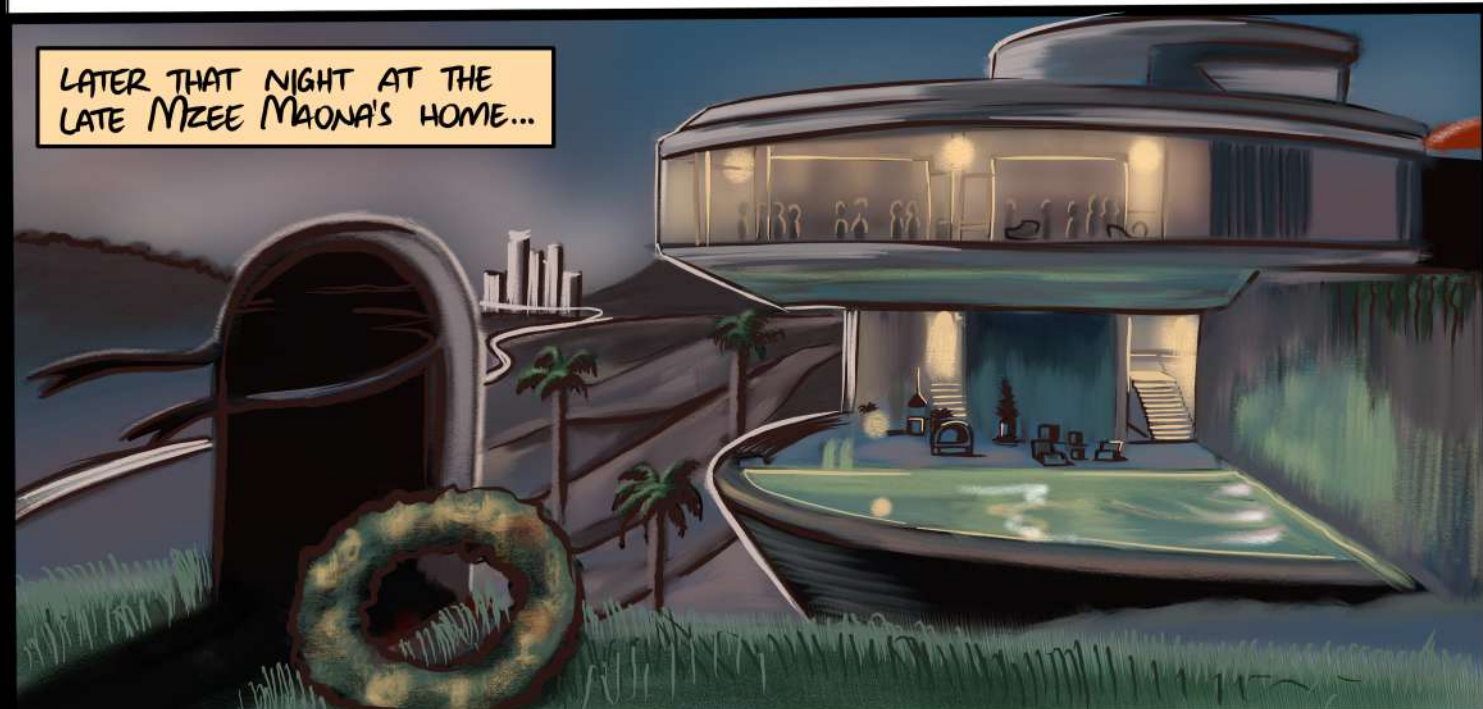
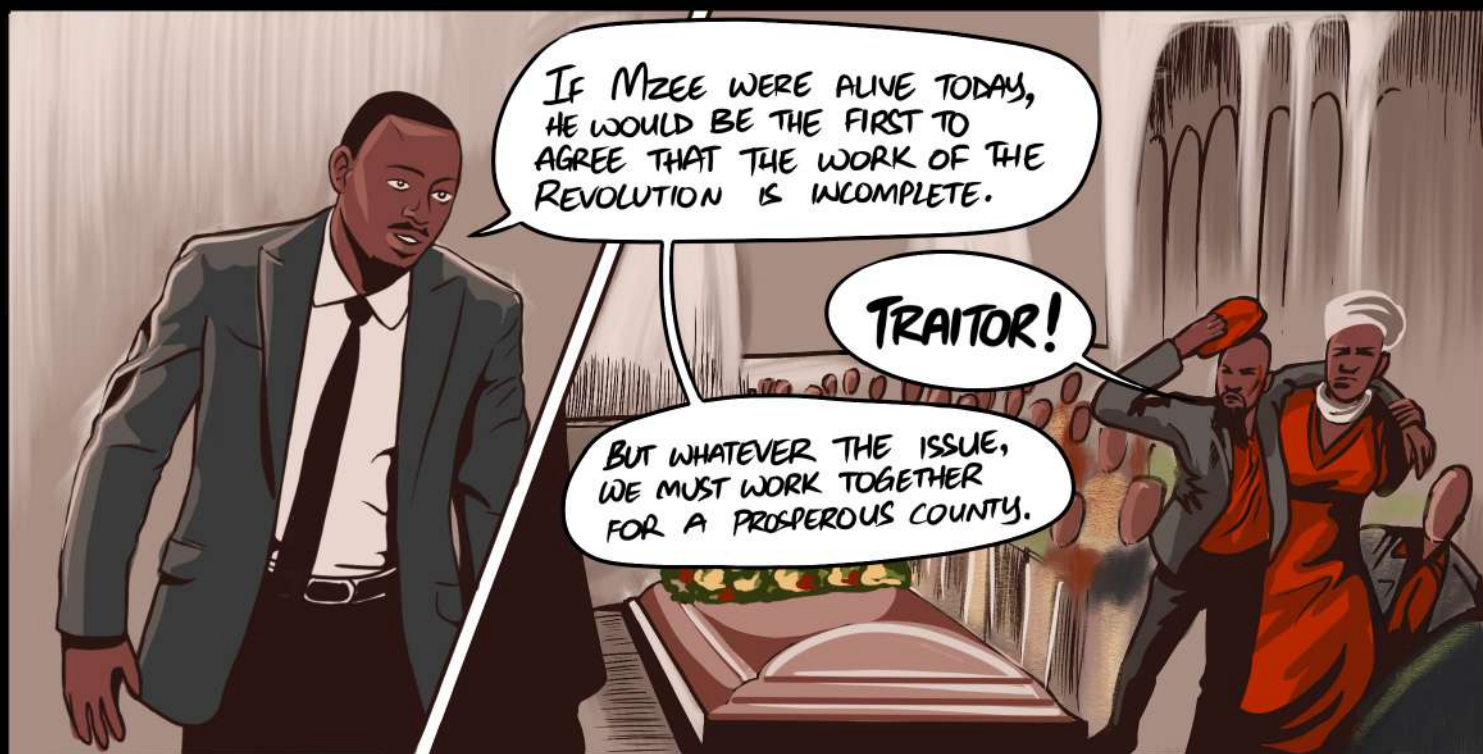


GRANDPA'S BODY IS NOT EVEN COLD AND THEY'RE ALREADY CAMPAIGNING?

KATIBORA POLITICS NEVER SLEEPS COUSIN.









AKI I'LL MISS MZEE.
HE WAS WONDERFUL...

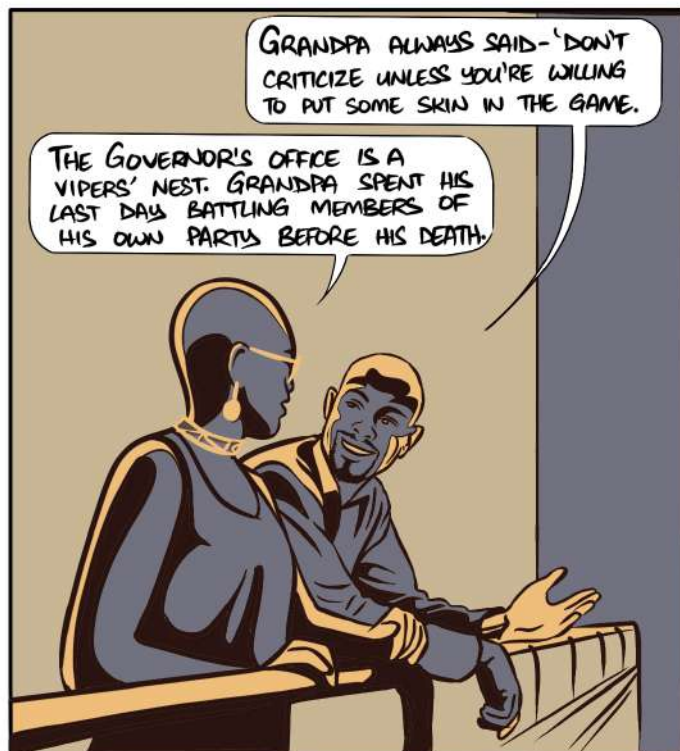
INDEED



QUITE A DAY,
WASN'T IT SIFA?



MIHMM. BUT YET
YOU STILL WISH
TO RUN FOR
GOVERNOR?



GRANDPA ALWAYS SAID- 'DON'T
CRITICIZE UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING
TO PUT SOME SKIN IN THE GAME.

THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE IS A
VIPERS' NEST. GRANDPA SPENT HIS
LAST DAY BATTLING MEMBERS OF
HIS OWN PARTY BEFORE HIS DEATH.



LOOK AROUND YOU SIFA. GRANDPA DID OKAY
FOR HIMSELF. BUT SO DID THIS COUNTY. I HAVE
A PLAN, BUT FOR IT TO WORK, I NEED YOU
AS MY CAMPAIGN MANAGER!

I ALREADY HAVE A JOB IN THE CITY. I LOVE IT VERY MUCH! UNLIKE BEING A POLITICAL FIXER WHICH WILL NO DOUBT AGE ME AND KILL ME BEFORE MY TIME!

NO MATTER HOW WELL YOU PLAY THE ROLE OF 'PROFESSOR OF HAPPINESS', WE BOTH KNOW THAT YOU'RE A MAONA - A POLITICAL ANIMAL. THINK OF THIS AS YOUR CHANCE TO PUT THEORY TO PRACTICE.

AND WHAT WILL I BE PRACTICING YONA? HOW TO PROMISE THE PEOPLE PARADISE WHILE ONLY DELIVERING PAPERWORK? I'D RATHER STICK TO TEACHING SUBJECTS I LOVE, TO STUDENTS THAT RESPECT ME.

TELL ME YONA, HOW IS IT THAT IN 2042 WOMEN MAKE UP ONLY 2 PER CENT OF C.C.W.'S LEADERSHIP YET WOMEN HAVE BEEN THE PRIMARY VICTIMS OF YOUR FLAWED AGRICULTURAL POLICIES.

PERHAPS BECAUSE TOO MANY GREAT WOMEN THINK THEY'RE ABOVE POLITICS.

HMM... A FREE PIECE OF ADVICE - IF YOU ARE DETERMINED TO RUN, BE YOUR OWN MAN. COME OUT OF GRANDPA'S SHADOW.

HAHAHA! YOU SEE SIFA! THIS IS WHY I NEED YOU ON MY TEAM! YOU NEVER SURRENDER. EVEN WHEN WE WERE KIDS.

BUT POLITICS ASIDE, THERE'S ANOTHER REASON YOU MIGHT WANT TO STAY...

My Dear Sifa,

As you know, I've always believed in the virtue of action over rhetoric. As a politician, this was always a challenging belief to uphold. But nothing grounded me more than working on my farm. Now, as I feel my arthritis taking its toll on me, I think of you - the only one of my grandchildren that's still interested in this old-fashioned practice of Farming. To you, I leave my old tractor, as well the five acres of farmland - My beloved orchard.

I hope it brings you back home more, and that you find in it the same joy that I did.

With Love,
Grandpa

A FEW DAYS LATER ON MZEE MAGNA'S FARM...

VROOM!!!









A FEW HOURS LATER...

YOU'RE LUCKY TO POSSESS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF KATIBORA'S HISTORY.

SHE IS A BEAUTY.



SEEING THIS TRACTOR AGAIN BRINGS TEARS TO MY EYES IT REMINDS ME OF WHAT WE WERE BEFORE YOUR GRANDPA STARTED FALLING SICK - BEFORE TRAITORS TOOK OVER CCW.

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION, FARMERS WERE CRIMINALIZED FOR SELLING AND SHARING SEEDS THAT ARE UNREGISTERED AND UNCERTIFIED.

AS A PASSIONATE FARMER HIMSELF, HE KNEW OUR STRUGGLES INTIMATELY. BUT WITHOUT HIM, THE PARTY BOSSES WERE CORRUPTED...

...THEY TOOK KICKBACKS FROM MULTINATIONALS LIKE GREENSHOTS THAT NOW DOMINATE OUR AGRICULTURE AND POLITICS BY FUNDING OUR POLITICIANS... AS THE SAYING GOES: 'KIKULACHO KI NGUONI MWAKO', OR -THE ENEMY IS WITHIN.





IT'S AS IF WHAT WE WERE DOING PREVIOUSLY WAS NO MORE THAN WITCHCRAFT!



AS THOMAS SANKARA WARNED US IN 1987, "WHAT THE COLONIZERS FAILED TO ACHIEVE BY FORCE OF ARMS, THEY WILL ACHIEVE WITH DEBT." WITH CONTRACTS, GREEN SHOOTS CONTROLS US FROM THE CLOUDS LIKE PUPPETS AND THEY HAVE NO LOCAL OFFICE WHERE WE CAN CONFRONT THEM.



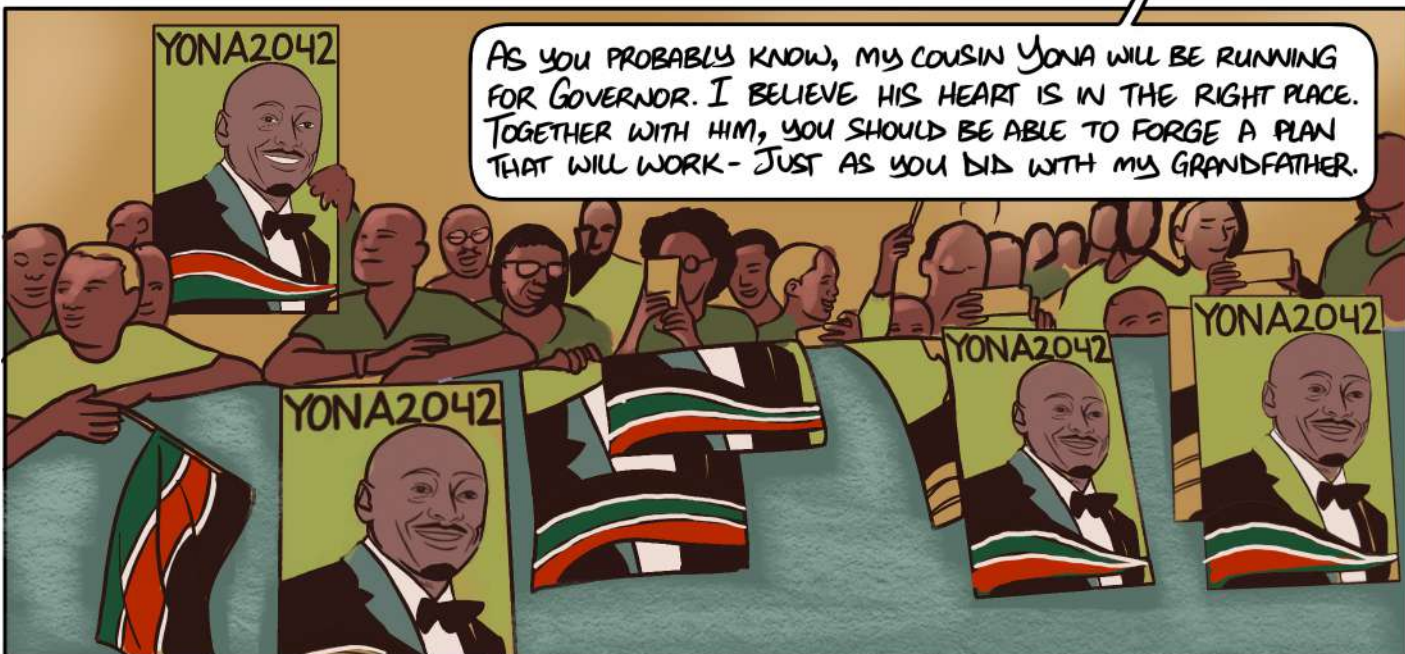
THE MOST PAINFUL PART IS THAT ALL OF THIS IS DONE WITH THE HELP OF OUR OWN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT.

IT WAS THEY WHO OPENED THE DOOR TO GREEN SHOOTS BY NOT PROMOTING FARMER MANAGED SEED SYSTEMS, PERMITTING THE USE OF TOXIC PESTICIDES BANNED ELSEWHERE, AND SUPPORTING THIS KIND OF CONTRACT FARMING.

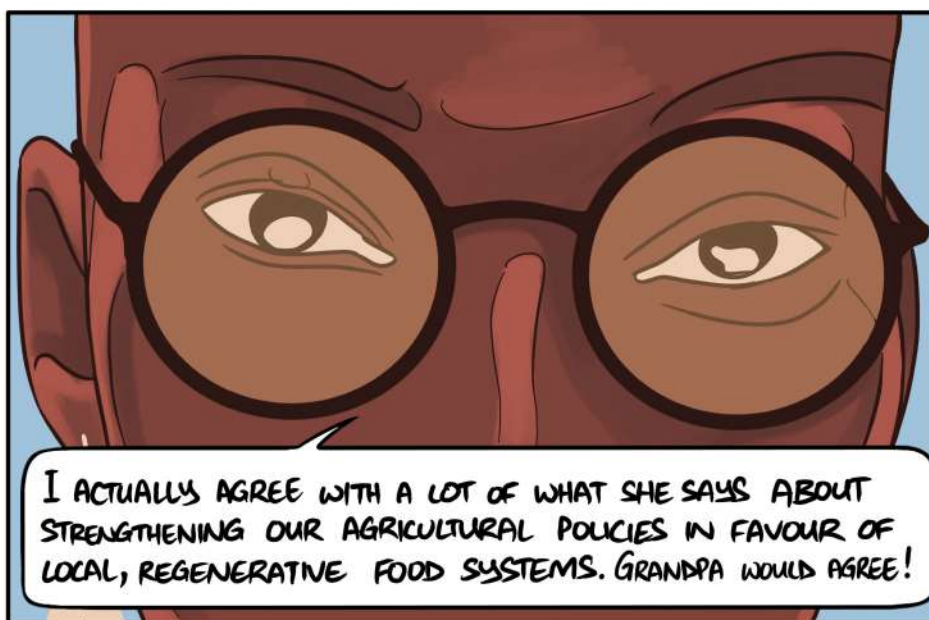
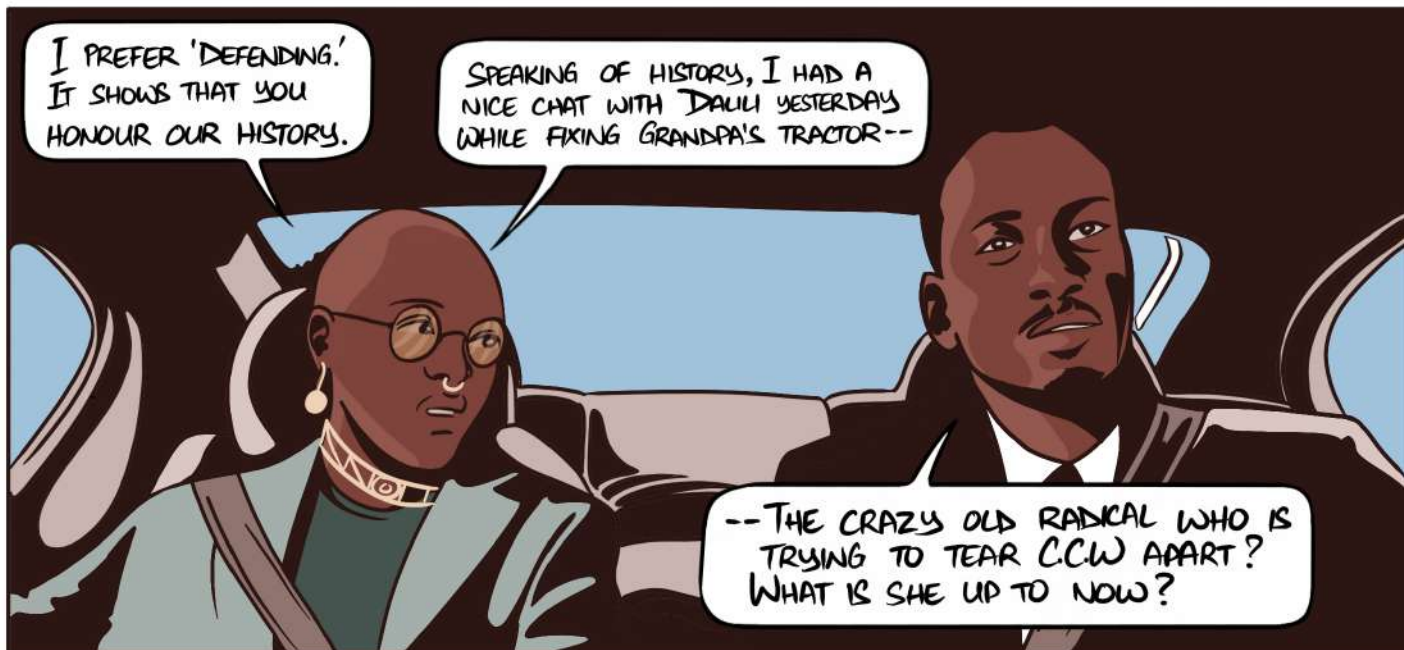


THAT'S TRAGIC...

AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, MY COUSIN YONA WILL BE RUNNING FOR GOVERNOR. I BELIEVE HIS HEART IS IN THE RIGHT PLACE. TOGETHER WITH HIM, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO FORGE A PLAN THAT WILL WORK - JUST AS YOU DID WITH MY GRANDFATHER.

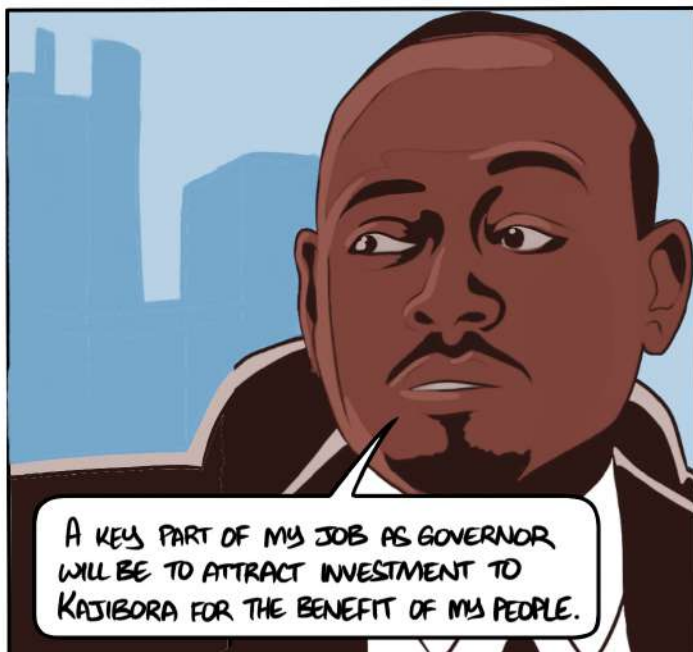








SO IT'S OKAY FOR GREEN SHOOTS TO ENJOY SPECIAL FAVOURS FROM YOU, BUT NOT THE PEOPLE OF KASIBORA?




A KEY PART OF MY JOB AS GOVERNOR WILL BE TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT TO KASIBORA FOR THE BENEFIT OF MY PEOPLE.



ADOPTING A HARD LINE WILL ONLY SHIFT THEIR FUNDING TO OUR OPPONENTS WHO - UNLIKE US - HAVE NO VISION FOR KASIBORA.



GREEN SHOOTS ONLY BENEFITS GREEN SHOOTS. THEY CONTROL THE ENTIRE SUPPLY CHAIN AS WELL AS FOOD PRICES IN THE REGION.




WHAT'S DALILI'S ALTERNATIVE?
SHE MAKES IT SOUND LIKE KATIBORA
WAS PARADISE BEFORE GREEN SHOOTS.
WE'LL LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING
SIFA, IT WASN'T. PEOPLE WERE HUNGRY!

THE REVOLUTION WAS ABOUT PRIORITISING
LOCAL PRODUCTION AND PRODUCING QUALITY
FOOD THAT IS AFFORDABLE FOR EVERYONE. IT
WAS ABOUT GIVING PEOPLE ACCESS TO LAND,
WATER AND SEEDS, AND PROTECTING NATURAL
RESOURCES. THAT WAS QUITE A UTOPIC
VISION FOR ITS TIME...



NOW, FARMERS CAN ONLY USE GREEN SHOOT'S
INPUTS, DRONES AND FINANCIAL SERVICES.
THAT'S FEUDALISM, NOT FREEDOM. THE
OPPOSITE OF EVERYTHING GRANDPA STOOD FOR.



WORST OF ALL, THEY'VE ACCELERATED THE
DECLINE OF OUR BIODIVERSITY, SOIL AND
WATER AS WELL AS THE NEAR EXTINCTION
OF OUR INDIGENOUS SEED SYSTEMS.



TODAY, CCW FRONTRUNNER YONA MAONA, JOINED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AT THIS YEAR'S JEMBE DAY CELEBRATIONS. THE C.C.W FRONTRONNER EXPRESSED HIS COMMITMENT TO UNIFY THE PARTY AND SUPPORT POLICIES AROUND AGROECOLOGY. YONA ALSO WARNED GREEN SHOOTS CORPORATION AGAINST EXPLOITING KASIBORA'S SMALLHOLDER FARMERS, AND TOLD MULTI-NATIONALS TO EXPECT NEW REGULATIONS...

RING!(((

BREAKING NEWS!



HELLO?--

--WHAT'S THIS WE'RE HEARING ABOUT "NEW REGULATIONS" YONA? I HAVE A BOARD THAT'S READY TO START RELOCATING OUR ENTIRE OPERATION OUT OF KASIBORA--

THERE'S NO NEED TO BE TRIGGER-HAPPY MY FRIENDS. ONE SPEECH IS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY FOR PARTY UNITY AND STABILITY. ONCE WE'RE IN, WE WILL DRAG OUR FEET.

HMM... YOU ARE A PRACTICAL MAN, YONA. UNLIKE YOUR GRANDFATHER. I HOPE WE CAN DO BUSINESS TOGETHER...

OF THAT I HAVE NO DOUBT MY FRIEND.



MEANWHILE... AT THE KASIBORA FARMERS CO-OPERATIVE

THANK YOU FOR COMING HERE ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE, SIFA. IT WAS IMPORTANT TO GIVE YOU THIS NEWS IN PERSON, I'M AFRAID. AS YOU KNOW, A POLITICIAN'S PROMISE IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE PEOPLE WILLING TO HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE...

YOUR COUSIN HAS BEEN LYING TO THE PUBLIC. WE INTERCEPTED A CALL BETWEEN HE AND G.S.C.

OF THAT I HAVE NO DOUBT... MY FRIEND

I'VE HEARD ENOUGH! THIS IS NOT WHY I CAME TO KASIBORA!

IF YONA THINKS HE CAN BETRAY THE REVOLUTION, HE'S IN FOR A SURPRISE!

I KNOW WHAT I MUST DO!

UROOOM!

IN A SHOCKING TURN OF EVENTS, THE CCW SPLITS AFTER 20 YEARS OF UNITY. THE NEW FACTION IS LED BY DALILI AND SIFA. THE MOVE IS AN ESPECIALLY HARD BLOW FOR YONA WHO NOT ONLY LOSES HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGER, BUT ALSO ALL HOPE OF WINNING THE GUBERNATORIAL RACE...

THIS IS AN ILLEGAL PROTEST. STAND DOWN NOW, OR YOU WILL BE PROSECUTED!



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About the Route to Food Initiative

The Route to Food Initiative is a publicly funded programme of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Nairobi. Through the initiative, a Route to Food Alliance has formed that works towards realising the Human Right to Food in Kenya. Our activities aim to influence the political approach to food security and target avenues related to policy development and implementation at national and county-level. Additionally, the initiative relies on creative communications and an influencer-led campaign to promote innovative solutions like agroecology to the problem of food insecurity. We engage with mainstream and alternative media to shift the emphasis of hunger and unaffordable or inadequate food to a discussion about food rights.

You can join the Route to Food Alliance via www.routetofood.org. If you would like a copy of this publication, it will be available on our website or can be ordered by emailing info@routetofood.org or calling Felistus on +254(0)202680745.



**We stand for the
Human Right to Food.**

**We stand against
the politics of hunger.**

Where do you stand?