

LIVING LARGE

COUNTING THE COST OF OFFICIAL EXTRAVAGANCE IN KENYA

Until all necessities are accessible to all members of our community,
no one should live in luxury using public resources.



Kenya National Commission on Human Rights

Transparency International - Kenya


Research Report on Wasteful Government Expenditure

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contents



Findings	5
Background	7
Waste and Human rights	8
What difference would this amount have made in realization of Economic and Social rights?	9
Who bought the vehicles?	10
About the cars	12
The 4x4 Range	14
What is a reasonable car?	16
Allocation of cars	17
It's not all bad news	17
How the research was conducted	18
The practise in other countries	21
Conspicuous consumption	22



The Findings

Between January 2003 and September 2004, the new NARC government spent at least Kshs 878million in the purchase of luxury cars that were largely for the personal use of senior government officials such as ministers, assistant ministers and permanent secretaries.

The cars include:

- Fifty seven Mercedes Benz (thirty eight E200K, Sixteen E240, one ML270, two C200K and one S350L) all worth at least Kshs 401 million
- Forty two Land Cruisers (A motley of Prados, GXs and VXs) worth at least sh.253.6 million
- Seventeen Mitsubishi Pajero's worth at least Kshs. 86.2 million
- Three Range Rovers, two Discoveries and a Freelander all worth at least Kshs 55.4 million
- Thirteen Nissan Terranos worth at least Kshs. 40.7 million
- Nine Nissan Patrols worth at least Ksh.38.8 million

Let us put these amounts in terms of 'opportunity cost' using examples from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) allocations to proxy the preferences of the citizenry. In the table 1 on page 7, we list the amounts that were allocated to various projects in the country's poorest constituencies in such a way that the cumulative total would fall Kshs 8 million shy of exhausting the Kshs 878 million.

The shocking finding is that the amount spent in the luxury cars is just about the same amount that was allocated under the Constituency Development Fund in thirty one of the country's poorest constituencies.

In other words, had the CDF committees in the 31 constituencies chosen to purchase the same set of vehicles as the central government, they would have had to forgo all the projects they were funding during the year.



In Mbita Constituency, it would have meant having to do without classrooms in 12 primary schools, classes and staff houses in 5 secondary schools, dams and boreholes in 4 water projects, projects in 8 health centres and an emergency reserve of 1.3 million.

Background

No amount of money can be enough with a spendthrift and predatory government. It is cruel that in a country where poverty is so rampant, our leader's appetite for luxurious living continues to be indulged. Perhaps even more harmful than the monetary loss is the damage that such wasteful expenditure causes by seriously undermining other reforms. Perceptions do matter. Conspicuous consumption builds resentment in society and ridicules efforts aimed at securing external financial support. Because the line between such expenditure and corruption is also very thin, senior government officials continue to be perceived as corrupt.

The authors of the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation seem to have understood these basic truths when they wrote -

"As we moved from a state-controlled economy to a more market-oriented economy in the nineteen nineties, we undertook macro-economic reforms which should have served us well were we not bogged down by corruption, mismanagement, unmanageable borrowing in the domestic market, poorly conceived public investments, wastefulness and general bad governance in government and the public sector."

The ERS proceeds to identify refocusing expenditures to be in favour of development, operations and maintenance, and poverty-alleviation as some of the government's priority areas. Lavish expenditures on luxury vehicles flies in the face of this intention.

In Ganze, the country's poorest constituency, this would have meant forgoing the following projects: Vitengeni Village Polytechnic, Emergency Reserve, constituency bursary, grader, tractor, water survey, and various projects at Mwangea, Ganze, Bamba, Jaribuni Secondary Schools and Soko Electricity Project.

Table 1: Poverty and CDF Project Allocations in selected constituencies

Constituency	Poverty Ranking	CDF Project Allocations 2004-05	Estimated No. of Poor	Share of each poor person
Ganze	210	28,788,762	92,826	9,462
Kuria	209	31,233,333	117,414	7,481
Kitui South	208	28,278,659	87,597	10,027
Kinango	207	31,464,438	120,254	7,304
Kaloleni	206	33,468,463	140,797	6,239
Bonchari	205	28,829,539	61,881	14,194
Rarieda	204	27,635,884	81,008	10,843
Ndhiwa	203	28,829,539	93,244	9,420
kitui central	202	30,922,240	114,696	7,658
Rangwe	201	29,911,496	104,335	8,419
Kasipul Kabondo	200	31,933,179	125,059	7,024
Ikolomani	199	26,059,333	64,847	13,545
Karachuonyo	198	28,345,678	88,284	9,949
Borabu/ North Mugirango	197	31,127,003	132,250	6,642
Wajir North	196	23,850,698	42,207	20,811
Bondo	195	27,811,852	83,139	10,565
Butula	194	26,170,935	65,991	13,310
Kisumu Rural	193	27,977,806	84,513	10,393
Budalangi	192	23,202,014	35,557	24,703
Funyula	191	24,691,353	50,824	17,282
Siakago	190	24,477,127	48,628	18,063
Magarini	189	26,983,061	74,316	11,819
Nambale	188	29,289,890	97,963	8,966
Gem	187	28,696,380	91,879	9,560
Mbita	186	23,808,998	53,720	16,351
Wajir South	185	24,788,737	51,822	16,950
Alego	184	30,490,081	110,266	7,966
West Mugirango	183	28,406,648	88,909	9,879
Mutito	182	25,636,443	60,512	14,516
Shinyalu	181	28,479,715	89,658	9,797
Kitui West	180	28,970,210	94,686	9,277
Total		870,559,494	2,649,082	

Sources- Economic Survey 2005, CDF Website : www.cdf.go.ke



Waste and Human Rights

A question often asked is - what have issues such as 'how the government spends its revenues' got to do with human rights?

Kenya is a signatory to regional and international conventions such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) through which the State recognizes the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and that this can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone enjoys not just civil and political rights, but also economic, social and cultural rights¹. The ICESCR imposes obligations on States to respect, protect and fulfil a range of economic, social and cultural rights.

The obligation to respect requires the government to refrain from interfering with the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. The obligation to protect requires the government to prevent violations of such rights by third parties. The obligation to fulfil requires that the government takes appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and other measures towards the full realization of citizens' rights in areas such as education, health, and housing "to the maximum of available resources".² It is in this regard that grave concern must be expressed when the state uses sizeable public resources to meet the comfort of a few at the expense of many citizens in situations of serious deprivation.

The question then to ask is whether the use of public resources for unnecessary luxury for a handful of people meets the human rights test on the obligation to fulfil? If the answer is no, then the conclusion one must reach is that human rights violations have occurred.

The last column in table 1 shows the amount that would go to each poor person were Kshs 878 million to be divided equally among the poor in a constituency. At the rate of a dollar (or seventy five shillings) a day, the amount would clearly be significant in reducing poverty in virtually any single constituency. Assuming that those living below the poverty line are able to meet at least half of their one dollar per day, Kshs 6840 per year would provide the other half. From the table, it is clear that the amount would have been adequate to lift all the poor in any particular constituency above the poverty threshold.

¹ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights- Preamble

² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights- Article 2.

What difference would this amount have made in realization of Economic and Social rights?

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology's annual spending per primary school child is about Ksh.4, 400³. While this may appear like a rather modest level of expenditure, it has won Kenya worldwide acclaim in enhancing the realization of the right to Education.



Kshs 878 million is enough to see 25,000 children through eight years of school.

As can be inferred from the table below, the money would have been sufficient to provide full 8 year bursaries for all primary school pupils in Marsabit and Moyale combined and in a number of other districts on their own.

Table 2: Primary school enrolment in selected districts (2003)

District	Primary School enrolment
Lamu	17,547
Tana River	27,431
Isiolo	18,986
Marsabit	14,103
Moyale	9,348
Wajir	18,499
Garissa	23,872
Ijara	3,968

Adapted from - Statistical Abstract 2004 - Central Bureau of Statistics

³ KNCHR- Annual State of Human Rights Report



It is estimated that there are about two million HIV positive people in the country. Out of these, 270,000 people require ARV treatment, but only 11,000 are receiving it. The cost of ARV's has fallen dramatically over the last few years and today, it is possible to get treatment at about Kshs 500 per month or Kshs 6,000 per year. At this rate Kshs 878 million would provide ARV treatment for 147,000 people for a whole year.

Who bought the vehicles?

The table below shows the top ten spenders over the period.

Table 3: The ten highest spenders

Ministry / Department	Amount Spent (ksh)
1 High Court of Kenya	82,572,720
2 Roads & Public Works	65,646,080
3 Water Resources Management & Development	47,664,167
4 State House	45,546,743
5 Regional Development	45,168,497
6 Cooperative Development	44,164,605
7 Foreign Affairs	42,960,240
8 Finance and Planning	40,948,240
9 Education Science & Technology	38,503,323
10 Office of the President	35,458,748

The High Court of Kenya led the pack by spending Kshs 82,572,720 for thirteen Mercedes E200K at about 6.35 million shillings a piece. Justice, it would appear, does not come cheap. The absolute poverty line (defined as the minimum standard required of an individual to fulfil his/her minimum recommended calorific requirements and basic non- food needs) in rural Kenya is estimated at Kshs 1,239 per month or Kshs 14,868 per year⁴. Working with these estimates, the High Court expenditure would have been adequate to provide the minimum requirements for about 5,500 people for a whole year. Assuming the poor are already meeting 50 % of their minimum basic requirements, the amount spent on judicial limousines would have been sufficient to lift ten thousand people out of poverty for one year.



Not very far behind the High Court was the Ministry of Roads and Public Works which spent close to 66 million shillings in purchasing one Mercedes E240, four Land Cruiser Prados, two heavy duty utility Land Cruisers, three Mitsubishi Pajeros V76 GLX and a Land Rover Freelander. This is close to what the government spent on malaria control in the 2003-2004 financial year⁵. Malaria is the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in Kenya and accounts for 30% of all

new attendance at outpatient hospitals. In the year 2002 for example, it was estimated that as many as 34,000 children below the age of five would die as a direct consequence of malaria infection. There is no doubt that had the funds been used to enhance malaria control, many lives would have been saved.

The Ministry of Water Resources and Management as it was then called spent close to 48 million shillings in the purchase of a Land Rover Discovery, two Mercedes Benz, one Land Cruiser VX, and two Mitsubishi Pajeros. How far would this have gone in the realization of the right to water for the ordinary wananchi? Consider- the Water Services Trust Fund spent Kshs 209 million in the 2003-2004 year on



⁴ Welfare Monitoring Survey III (1997), Economic Survey 2005.

⁵ KNCHR- The State of Human Rights Report 2003-2004.

19 projects which were expected to benefit 310,000 Kenyans⁶. This works out to an average cost of Kshs 11 million per project, with an average of 16,315 beneficiaries. It would therefore be plausible to project that the 48 million shillings would have translated into 4.4 projects and benefited close to 72,000 people.

About the Cars

Mercedes Benz:

The luxury car of choice among the high level cadres in government is the Mercedes Benz - various government departments purchased 56 of them during the period. Kenya is truly the original home of the Wabenzi⁷. The E class appears to be a particularly popular trophy/status symbol.



A car reviewer describes the Mercedes Benz E Class as follows⁸ :

It looks fresh and youthful and expresses status in elegant, understated fashion. Every E class car comes standard with eight airbags: dual front airbags, side impact bags both for front and rear, and head protection curtains that run the length of the cabin on both sides. The airbag management system employs multiple impact sensors designed to more precisely control the timing and rate of deployment... the system accounts for the weight of a front seat passenger and controls seat belt pretensioners according to the force of impact. New E class features ambient cabin lighting, the latest trend in interior design... these strips of soft, low level cabin lighting in the headliner remain on during darkness, like a fancy nightlight in the bathroom. The E320 comes with fully automatic dual zone climate control, a power tilt and telescoping steering wheel, 10- way power front seats with leather seating surfaces, real burl walnut trim, nine speaker stereo, power windows with one touch express operation up and down, auto-dimming mirrors and rain sensing wind-shield wipers. Extras include- adaptive distronic cruise control, which maintains a set distance from cars ahead; keyless go, a credit card sized transmitter which allows unlocking the doors and starting the car by touching the door handle and gear selector; parktronic obstacle warning which helps with parking and enhances safety by alerting the driver to objects in front of and behind the car, ventilated massaging seats...

Like other Mercedes cars, the E Class is remarkably well made, but in achieving the objective of ferrying a person from one place to another in a cost effective manner, these features are totally unnecessary.

⁶ KNCHR- The State of Human Rights Report 2003-2004.

⁷ Wabenzi is a Swahili term for the Big Men of Africa

⁸ Adapted from <http://www.automotive.com/2005/43/mercedes-benz/e-class/reviews>



According to the information that we received, the most expensive car bought was a Mercedes Benz S 350 L (registration A824G) purchased by the Ministry of Regional Development in May 2003 and delivered to cabinet to replace one then with the VP's office at a cost of Kshs 15.96 million.

Anecdotal evidence however suggests more flamboyant models are in use particularly by cabinet ministers. The minister for roads and public works for example reportedly purchased a customised S500 at a cost of about Ksh 14,000,000.⁹

Mercedes Benz S500



⁹ A Tale of the Wabenzi- <http://www.ocnus.net/cgi-bin/exec/view.cgi?archive=72&num=18856> and Sunday Nation December 7, 2003

The 4X4 Range:

The prize for extravagance among different models bought however goes not to the Mercedes Range but to the Range Rover and Land Cruisers. As the table below illustrates, they largely make up the list of the ten most expensive cars which altogether cost the tax payer well over 109 million shillings. Ksh9 million more than was allocated for the construction of a new presidential residence in the budget FY 2005/2006. Less frivolously, the price of a grader (judging from allocations in constituencies such as Magarini and Kuria) is about Kshs 3.5 Million. For the price of these ten cars, the government would have provided a grader in 31 constituencies and gone a long way in ensuring that roads become passable.

Table 4: The ten most expensive cars bought

Type	Model	Unit Cost	Purchasing Ministry/Department
Land Rover	Range Rover	15,526,188	Office of the President
Land Rover	Range Rover	11,829,565	Cooperative Development
Land Rover	Range Rover	11,522,600	Lands & Housing
Toyota	Heavy Duty Utility LWB	10,283,047	Roads & Public Works
Toyota	Land Cruiser VX	10,108,850	Livestock and Fisheries Development
Toyota	Land Cruiser VX	10,108,850	Education Science & Technology
Toyota	Land Cruiser VX	10,108,850	Office of the Vice President & Special Representative
Toyota	Land Cruiser VX	10,108,850	Foreign Affairs
Toyota	Land Cruiser- Heavy Duty Utility	10,108,850	National Assembly
Toyota	Land Cruiser VX	10,108,792	Water Resources Management
Total		109,814,442	

The second most expensive car bought was the Range Rover.



To be sure, the Range Rover is some piece of work. A guide to car buyers describes it thus... *The Range Rover feels amazing and makes you feel amazing. There is the richly luxurious leather, the height of the seats and the airiness of the cabin, which creates an amazing atmosphere ...it has incredible road presence... the car simply oozes class. The Range Rover will put up with anything you throw at it- be it rivers, rocks, valleys or wheel-deep mud*.¹⁰

Clearly the intent in purchasing the Range Rover is not to bash it up in the manner that its capabilities suggest. Few senior government officers will spend much time crossing rivers, climbing rocks or wading through mud. The conclusion one can draw therefore is that the utility of the features that make such a car so expensive lies mainly in the comfort of knowing that it can do so much.

Suppose the Minister for Cooperative Development was also the MP for Ndhiwa constituency and he decided to donate the Range Rover to his constituents for sale at cost. Suppose also that they bought their MP a new, but modest, car at about Ksh1.2 million. Our estimates, based on their CDF allocations, is that the balance could be used to do the following:

- Construction of 7 health facilities (Kshs 3,200,000)
- Konyua Water Project (300,000)
- Construction and rehabilitation of 13 primary schools (4,000,000)
- Construction and rehabilitation of 5 secondary schools (2,500,000)
- Supplementing bursary fund (Kshs 500,000)
- Logistics and administration (90,000)

The Toyota Land Cruiser is also a popular status symbol. At a price of over Kshs 10,000,000 each of them is enough to pay ten people a salary of Kshs 15,000 for five and a half years.



¹⁰Adapted from <http://www.cbq.ie/article>

What is a reasonable Car ?

Treasury circular No.6/98 dated 11th June 1998 provided some guidance on what government considers to be reasonable cars. It outlined the implementation of economy measures on the use of vehicles, telephones and hiring private residential accommodation – and prohibited the purchase of saloon and estate cars exceeding 2000 cc in engine capacity with immediate effect.

In May 2004, the Head of the Civil Service wrote to all permanent secretaries and accounting officers providing the following guidelines regarding purchases of cars. These guidelines are also to be found in the Government Financial Management Act 2004.

Schedule Maximum Engine Capacity and Cost Estimates Ceilings of Government Fleet Passenger Vehicles

Vehicle User	Saloon Cars		4x4 Utility Vehicles	
	Maximum Engine Capacity (cc)	Cost Estimate (ksh)	Maximum Engine Capacity (cc)	Cost Estimate (ksh)
1 Minister Speaker, National Assembly Chief Justice Attorney General Head of Public Service	2600	8,500,000	3000	5,500,000
2 Assist.Minister Permanent Secretary Accounting Officer Court of Appeal Judge Controller & Auditor General Chairman PSC Chairman ECK Provincial Commissioner Commissioner of Police	2400	6,200,000	3000	5,500,000
3 Officers on Job Group R & above High Court Judge Parastatal Chief Executive	2000	4,200,000	2900	4,700,000
4 Officers on Job Group n to Q and equivalent	1800	2,500,000	2500	3,500,000
5 All other officers and Pool vehicles	1600	1,800,000	2200	3,000,000

Several of the cars purchased particularly the 4x4 utility vehicles are clearly above what the Head of the Civil Service considered reasonable. It is however important to point out that these guidelines provide the maximum limits- they by no means oblige any officer to ensure they are reached. Secondly, given the practice in countries such as Rwanda where the maximum engine capacity is 2000 cc, these provisions are rather generous.

There is no easy answer to the question of what a reasonable car is. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights for example deemed Honda CRV's costing Ksh 2.87 million each to be reasonable vehicles for its Commissioners when it was well within their rights to spend sh 4.2 million on each Commissioner's car and Ksh 6.2 million (enough for a Mercedes E 200K) for the chairman.

Allocation of Cars

The Commission was unable to comprehensively establish how the cars purchased were assigned among the senior officers. This is an area that requires further investigation. Unconfirmed reports for example indicate that a senior official in the judiciary has 8 (eight) assigned to him, some with civilian plates.

It's not all bad news

Not all the news of expenditure on vehicle purchases during the period was questionable. The Office of the President for example spent more than one billion shillings to purchase a large fleet of 417 Toyota Land Cruiser pickups, 24 Corolla and 20 Condors for the Kenya Police. Given that there are about 500 police stations in the country, one can only hope that no station now is without a vehicle and that this will yield results in terms of law and order¹¹. The Ministry of Health also purchased 54 Nissan double Cabs at a cost of Ksh.120 million which will hopefully result in increased realization of the right to health.

There were reports of some permanent secretaries and assistant Ministers using modest cars. They represent hope and we applaud them.



¹¹This research was unable to establish how the vehicles were distributed.

How the Research was Conducted

This research project was conducted jointly by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) and Transparency International-Kenya.

Like other national human rights institutions, the KNCHR has the broad mandate to foster the enjoyment and protection of Human Rights. The National Commission is therefore concerned with the effect of wasteful government expenditure and in particular, its opportunity costs with respect to the enjoyment of social and economic rights by Kenyans.

TI-Kenya is an accredited National Chapter of Transparency International the only global non-governmental organisation exclusively devoted to combating corruption. One of TI's multiple concerns is human rights based, as corruption undermines and distorts development and leads to increasing levels of human rights abuses and violations.

The project sought to objectively research the magnitude and opportunity cost consequences of expenditure of a personal nature incurred by high ranking public officers that cannot be justified on considerations of economy or security. This report examines one aspect of such wastage of public funds - the purchase of luxury cars for senior government officers. The choice of luxury cars was based on several considerations- they are visible, expensive, unnecessary and serve individuals rather than the general good. The expenditure was also largely avoidable because the offices existed prior to the coming into office of the new government and presumably the previous office holders had official cars. This research was unable to establish the fate of the cars used by previous office bearers.

The KNCHR is mandated by its constitutive act to investigate suo moto or upon a complaint made by any person or group of persons, the violation of any human rights and to perform such other functions as it may consider necessary for the promotion and protection of human rights.¹²

In the performance of its functions under the Act, the Commission has the powers of a court to –

- (a) Issue summonses or other orders requiring the attendance of any person before the Commission and the production of any document or record relevant to any Investigation by the Commission;
- (b) Question any person in respect of any subject matter under investigation before the Commission;
- (c) Require any person to disclose any information within such person's knowledge relevant to any investigation by the Commission.¹³

¹²Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Act, 2002 Section 16

¹³Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Act 2002- Section 19

The act further provides that a person who fails to attend before the Commission in accordance with any summons or order issued or refuses without lawful excuse, to answer any question or to produce any document or knowingly gives any false or misleading information to the commission commits an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding twenty thousand shillings, or to imprisonment for term not exceeding six months, or to both.¹⁴

In July 2004, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights wrote to all permanent secretaries requesting for information on each Ministry's expenditure on the purchase and maintenance of motor vehicles since January 2003. In specific, the Commission requested for information on:

1. The number and description of vehicles purchased and used by the Minister, Assistant Minister and Permanent Secretary
2. The cost of servicing and repairing any vehicles purchased
3. The details of air travel by officers of the rank of Permanent Secretary (or equivalent) and above both nationally and internationally
4. The costs, if any, of renovations and refurbishments of the offices of Ministers, Assistant Ministers and Permanent Secretaries.

The Commission and Transparency International-Kenya however later decided to limit the scope of the study to the purchase of motor vehicles.

The Permanent Secretaries in the following ministries and departments responded by providing full information as requested:

- Education, Science and Technology
- Regional Development
- Department of Governance and Ethics
- Water Resources Management
- Finance

The request for information in other departments and ministries however, was met with suspicion and resistance as indicated below. Some Permanent Secretaries responded in the following manner without providing the required information:

- Information and Communication: Asked for more time. A substantive response was received in May 2005, almost a year later.
- Police Department: Referred the Commission to the Permanent Secretary, Provincial Administration and National Security
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Promised to respond substantively, but to date they have not responded.
- Transport and Communication: Responded that the Ministry is in the process of retrieving the information from auditors
- Local Government: Immediately sent wrong information to the Commission but later the correct information in June 2005.

¹⁴Kenya National Commission on Human Rights Act 2002- Section 19

- Trade and Industry: Sought advice from the Attorney General on 9/8/04¹⁵ and only responded in May 2005.
- The Permanent Secretary, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Public Service: Also sought advice from the Attorney General
- Livestock and Fisheries Development: Requested for more time but to date have not provided any information.
- Directorate of Personnel Management: Responded in August 2005 (more than a year later), after the Commission had sent reminders and summons.

Even after reminders and issuance of summons, other permanent secretaries did not respond at all. They included:

- Energy;
- Lands & Housing;
- Environment & Natural Resources;
- Labour & Human Resource;
- Cooperative Development;
- Gender, Sports, Culture & Social Services;
- Justice and Constitutional Affairs
- State Law Office;
- Registrar High Court
- Department of Defence
- Roads & Public Works;
- Planning & National Development
- Agriculture;
- Health
- Tourism & Wildlife

The Commission then sought the information from the main dealers and franchise holders of the motor vehicles mostly used by government. These were:

- Marshalls East Africa – for Peugeot Models
- Simba Colt Motors- for Mitsubishi Models
- Land Rover Kenya -for Range Rover, Land Rover and VW Models
- DT Dobie – the franchise holder for Mercedes and Nissan Models.

Much of the data in this report draws from information provided by the dealers. That the Commission had to go this route is unfortunate as this information should be publicly available to the taxpayers who finance the purchase of the vehicles. Clearly, there is much to do in the way of enhancing transparency in government and access to official information by Kenyans.

¹⁵Following a request by the Hon. Attorney General, the National Commission in October 2004 prepared and submitted a legal opinion on its mandate and powers.

The Practise in Other Countries

South Africa

The official vehicle policy in South Africa provides that legislators at national level may be provided with two official vehicles while legislators at provincial level may be provided with one vehicle. The maximum purchase price of the vehicle, including a 150,000 kilometre maintenance plan, cannot exceed 70% of the all-inclusive annual remuneration package and allowances of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers

United Kingdom

In Britain, the Prime Minister has published detailed guidance on the vehicles which may be provided by the Government Car Service for use by Ministers. Broadly speaking, Cabinet Ministers can have use of an appropriate car - Vauxhall Omega Elite or the Rover 75 Connoisseur. Ministers of State and Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State are given the choice of a Rover 45, Ford Mondeo, Vauxhall Vectra or Nissan Primera with an engine capacity in the 1.8 to 2.0 litre category with a comfortable but not extravagant level of fit.

China

In the Peoples Republic of China, vehicles are only assigned to incumbent senior officials of the rank of Vice Minister and above. The exhaust emission volume of the vehicles used by the Vice Ministers are limited to no more than 1.8ML, whereas that of the vehicles used by Ministers are restricted to less than 2.4 ML.

Rwanda

Pride of place in the struggle to curb waste in government in the use of vehicles goes to President Paul Kagame of Rwanda. We interviewed the first secretary at the Rwanda Embassy¹⁶ and learnt that in December 2004; a decision was taken by the cabinet following concern over high budgetary allocations, to sell all four wheel drive vehicles with an engine capacity of 2000cc and above. The government then proceeded to impound 250 vehicles which included those in donor funded government projects and those in NGOs that were implementing government projects.

Only the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, the Senate Speaker and head of the Supreme Court are entitled to have one government vehicle of not more than 2000cc. The Ministers and other senior government officers are given loans to purchase vehicles of their choice and fixed allowances for maintenance. The government hires vehicles as need arises, for example, vehicles for official up-country travel.

As of May 2005, the sale of vehicles had raised \$ 3.5 million (about ksh266 million) and more is expected to be saved in fuel and maintenance costs.

Burundi

Newspapers reports indicate that Burundi's President recently put a stop to the purchase of luxury government vehicles and plans to auction those already bought. The government spokesman noted that a single Prado's fuel consumption on two full tanks is equivalent to a minister's salary.¹⁷

Elsewhere, Thomas Sankara is reported to have forced his ministers to exchange their Mercedes for Renault 5s before being overthrown in 1987, while Sam Nujoma swapped his for a Volvo in 2001. President Levy Mwanawasa (Zambia's president) famously took a public bus to the airport in 2002.¹⁸

¹⁶ Mr. Desire Mugwiza

¹⁷ The New Vision, Thursday September 29 2005

¹⁸ A Tale of the Wabenzi- <http://www.ocnus.net/cgi-bin/exec/view.cgi?archive=72&num=18856>

Conspicuous Consumption

Why do our leaders engage in such extravagant displays of wealth?

The excesses of the Wabenzi in many other countries in Africa's are legion. Here is how they get around according to Aidan Hartley¹⁹. The president of Zimbabwe has a custom built, armoured S600L which can withstand grenades and landmines in addition to a car pool of dozens of S320s and E240S. In what is now referred to as the "Benz Aid" scandal, Malawi purchased 39 S Class Mercedes Benz at about Kshs 240 million at a time when 65% of her population was living below the poverty line. In Swaziland where 70% of the population live in poverty, the King has a Maybach 62 worth about Kshs 37 million and a fleet of BMW for his ten wives and three fiancées. President Mbeki "test drove" an armoured S600L for six months (handing it back just before an embarrassing scandal broke) - before Muammar Gaddafi gave him another as a present.²⁰

In his book, *The Theory of Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen a professor of Economics at the University of Chicago suggested an organizing principle which could be used to explain this behaviour. He coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption" to describe the ostentatious squandering of resources by the wealthy classes. He defined conspicuous consumption as the waste of money by people to display a higher status than others. Conspicuous consumption is the consumption of a good because it gives the purchaser some form of status.

In terms of displaying wealth and status, flashy cars make good advertisements: they are very visible and provide a hard to fake signal.



Clearly, much of the utility derived from these luxury cars is a consequence of their price rather than their substance. This analysis suggests that our leaders are spending large amounts on status goods in an attempt to "keep up with the Joneses"-

The message they convey is that they have reached the pinnacle of power, life is good. "This car is the expression of my success, I am making a statement".

¹⁹ Aidan Hartley- *A tale of the Wabenzi*

²⁰ Ibid

However, the price that the country pays for this is clearly dear. We should recognize extravagance as the violation of human rights that it clearly is.

Recommendations

1. Government guidelines need to be revised to ensure frugality in vehicles purchased. There is need to re-think the government vehicle policy
2. Public officers purchasing vehicles above existing guidelines should be surcharged
3. Luxury cars should not be purchased using public funds. Public Officers should be given loans to purchase vehicles of their choice and then provided with a fixed fuel and maintenance allowance as is the practise in countries such as Rwanda
4. There is need to explore cost saving measures such as :
 - the use of a pool fleet
 - Hiring vehicles on a need basis
5. Greater transparency should be exercised both in the assignment of cars among senior officers and in the use of civilian plates.

