

Salute to Kenyan women who triumphed in the elections

This year's Women's Equality Day theme is celebrating women's right to vote. How apt for Kenya as a country. We are currently on election mode having held elections on the 9th of August 2022 and recording the highest number of elected women since independence in 1963. Of the 16,098 candidates, 30 female MPs were elected, up from 23 in 2017, 7 female governors were elected, up from 3 in 2017, and 3 female senators. While the mood is still unsettled given the election petitions in court and a few other pending elections at governor and constituency levels, the whole country is eager for closure, because we need to put bread on the table, after all. And this is essentially what voting is really about. Choosing leaders who honour our votes by ensuring that we experience a better quality of life in a conducive and inclusive environment.

As we move on, the issue of the blatant disregard to apply the two-thirds gender rule even as provided for in the constitution of Kenya, remains. There have been many arguments for and against the provision, probably more than any other provision in the constitution that touches on rights and equality. This speaks volumes about prevailing patriarchal attitudes even amongst well-read and exposed men and some women in positions of leadership who project vague reasons for why we should not apply the two-thirds gender rule. Some argue that if indeed this is



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about equality, then men and women should compete for positions on the same platform, historical injustices that have perpetuated discrimination against women and set them on a less favorable path to compete fairly notwithstanding. From expe-

rience, the enactment of the two-thirds gender rule will require the goodwill of political party leaders to guide their party members in parliament to support it. We are optimistic that this will happen with the new parliament and that the increased number of women elected to serve will not be used as yet another excuse to trivialize the provision.

The visibility in leadership roles held by women is important for changing mind-sets and attitudes and for encouraging even more women to seek public office. Beyond this, we need all leaders to apply the principles of good governance and leadership and translate these into quality and accountable service delivery and law-making, for our votes to count, otherwise the voter apathy we experienced in the recent elections will continue to rise. Voter apathy is a dangerous trend because it allows for the voices of the majority, mostly the vulnerable and marginalized, to be suppressed. Inequalities thrive in such environments, with women and girls being the top casualties.

Most Kenyans are not aware that they continue to be short-changed by their leaders and this because our threshold for accountability remains relatively low and inconsistent. A road can remain incomplete for years and we are okay with it. Hospitals can and do remain understaffed, dirty and without medicine and we are okay with it. The paradox is that health budget allocations at

national and county levels are some of the highest. Women continue to fetch water from rivers and streams in this day and age and we are okay with it, even when budgets reflect hefty allocations for water provision that cannot be accounted for. Sexual and Gender Based Violence incidences continue to flood our homes and neighborhoods and we are okay with it, including with how difficult and expensive it is to access justice in this country. We have normalized being short-changed without realizing that

 **The vote is a symbol of independence of choice in electing ideal leaders. For most women, empowerment has been secured through the collective power of voting in leaders committed to addressing inequalities especially when electoral processes are transparent. "**

these are the very issues that sustain the inequality that we wrongly think can only be solved by electing leaders from our own ethnic background and worse, rewarding leaders who have tainted records in terms of their relationship with the public purse.

As we allow our leaders to settle into their roles, we ask that elected leaders, both women and men,

are held to the same standards and that we desist from expecting elected women leaders to perform magic to 'prove' that they deserve to be in those roles, which is actually a form of intimidation. These national values and principles of governance outlined in Article 10 of the Constitution of Kenya are binding to public officials and all persons who enact, apply or interpret any law and also to those who make and implement public policy decisions. There are no exceptions.

We ask our elected women leaders to continue shining and lead the way in implementing their mandate by upholding equity, social justice, equality, inclusiveness and protection of the marginalized and to exercise integrity, transparency and accountability while at it so that we can achieve sustainable development as a country. That women make better leaders may sound cliché, but that women who apply themselves within the tenets of good governance make the best leaders is definitely true and we know that this will be Kenya's story moving forward, as we work at reducing the inequalities that continue to plague us due poor management of resources, resulting from poor leadership and subsequently honoring the women's votes and their positions in public leadership.

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