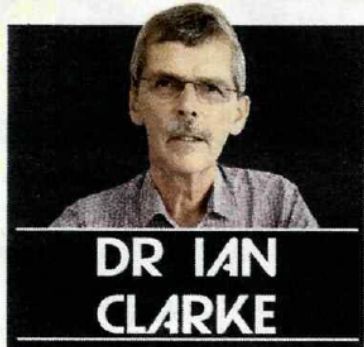


We celebrate International Women's Day and pride ourselves that we have a good representation of women in politics, government and business: the speaker of Parliament, the prime minister and the vice-president are all women. Women occupy high positions as permanent secretaries, while we have women who are managing directors of banks and big telecom companies.

Women are also well represented in middle management, often outperforming their male counterparts. We congratulate ourselves on how progressive we are, but the truth is that the vast majority of Ugandan women are far from appreciated because it is women who hold this society together. There are two types of women and by celebrating those in high places, we miss the real heroes – the long-suffering women who do all the work, bear the children and hold the family and society together.

Any woman who is a mother and has a career is to be congratulated. It is no small achievement to go through pregnancies and childbirth and still compete with men in the workplace who do not carry any of these burdens. I recently read the autobiography of Angela Merkel who served as the German chancellor for 16 years. She is a woman of high integrity, strong

WHO ARE THE REAL HEROES?



DR IAN CLARKE

» **THE LONG-SUFFERING WOMEN WHO WORK, BEAR CHILDREN AND HOLD FAMILIES AND SOCIETIES TOGETHER, ARE THE REAL HEROES TO BE CELEBRATED.**

moral fibre with an incredible work rate, but she made the choice not to have children in order to compete in a man's world. Working mothers

have two full-time jobs.

One big advantage that Africa has over western countries is the minimal cost of childcare, so that working mothers can afford a nanny who makes their life easier in terms of looking after the children. It is significant that Zoran Mamdani, a Ugandan himself, made free childcare one of the pillars for his election campaign for mayor of New York, where childcare is so expensive it is difficult for mothers to return to the workplace. In Uganda, we have successful women who juggle family and career, but these are usually urban women, and there is a huge difference between urban and rural women. Rural women are the real heroes, the glue that holds our society together.

The women who work on my farm often come with a baby on their back and make an informal creche so that they can pick coffee. When they get paid, they do not go to the local bar as the men do, but use their cash for the family. Many of these women have the total responsibility for bringing up the children – feeding, clothing, educating and taking care of them,



A woman carrying firewood. Most women in the village carry the responsibility of looking after the family

while at the same time working in the garden. The life of a village woman could be described as drudgery and yet they retain their dignity and even their sense of humour. There is a common factor that unites the village women and

high-level women in politics – both are the pawns of men. Women may till the land, plant the crops and harvest the coffee, but how many own the land or receive a fair reward for their labour?

Men are fine with celebrating women, so long as they continue to control them, and it is still the case that in most rural parts of Uganda women are considered as property.

Although there is quite an effort being put into helping the girl child, unless we instil into men respect for the rights of women, women will continue to be taken advantage of. Traditional Ugandan men are not willing to treat women as equals, but believe it is the place of women to serve them. It is the women who are left alone to suffer the pregnancies and deliveries, bring up the children, and work in the shamba, but when there is cash or property involved, the men are there – to claim it. Despite paying lip service, we do not actually respect women in this society, we use them. We use them for sex, labour, to bring up the children we have fathered, we give them cash when it suits us, but we hold onto the property and the means of controlling them.