



Does women occupation of top leadership positions translate into emancipation?

Ruth Birungi > Women empowerment

One wonders whether we have made any achievement in empowering the society and women against inequality, exclusion and gender-based violence. In one of my conversations with a friend; he re-echoed to me his current thought about women and power.

"Well, it is now time for women to rule" as we discussed on women, power and leadership. Our discussion was focusing on the two of the initial G5 (German, United Kingdom) having preferred their top most leaders to be women. My friend and I tried to escalate the debate around this trend of women in power and how it decipheres to real women emancipation.

In Africa, we found out that women have performed quite well in joining politics at all levels. Rwanda has been taking lead with 64 per cent of the MPs being women. In Uganda, women in the 10th parliament are more than 35 per cent of the MPs. With all this, one would say that the situation of every woman should be better than the past because with women at the helm of policy making, influencing and implementation, we would expect the trickledown effect on every woman around the globe. In our conversation, we brainstormed on what could be the enabling factors. My friend told me that it is a huge achievement coming a long way from the struggles of the feminists who have fought for over a century and three decades and won. So for now, men have to bow to the pressure of letting women topple the world. This argument to me then seemed

to be a war between men and women! My stand, however, is that any form of empowerment should enforce all the parts of the society both men and women of all ages and tribes to equitably benefit from the country's resources and equally contribute to its development. I also know that the efforts of women empowerment have been geared towards ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunities to access resources and power as enshrined in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

The reality, however, is still different. We greatly notice that between 48 and 65 per cent of women in Africa live in poverty, only 15 per cent of the women own land and yet they are the biggest producers in agriculture. In Uganda, women are still living in poverty with 27 per cent of the chronically poor households headed by women.

Worse still, girls in Uganda are married off at a very early age. Uganda has the highest teenage pregnancy in Sub Saharan Africa with 24 per cent getting pregnant before the age of 18. Even with these challenges, there are many more unearthed challenges facing women from different categories because of the environment and the status they occupy in society.

Feminist scholars recognised that there were important differences among women and men rather than simply between them which they termed as intersectionality. By this they meant that there are differences in the form of inequality between women from the rich and the poor classes, the rural

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and the urban and across various social and religious groups which are unique with each of them requiring a distinctive intervention and understanding of the environment hence should never be generalised.

For example, while the perception is that the urban elite women are better empowered and may not be suffering from any form of violence, their challenges may be different such as balancing household chores and employment in a society where gender roles are still demarcated as well as discrimination at work among others. On the other hand, the rural women may still be struggling to take the sole responsibility of bringing food on the table requiring them to work for longer hours with no rest, violence from drunkard men, in-laws among others. This may therefore hinder the women in leadership to understand the needs of every woman in every sphere because they are in a different strata and may not fully represent the needs of other women in the other categories.

In another perspective, the gender perceptions of what defines a man or woman in many societies is still a huge impingement for any ordinary woman to thrive well in a

male dominated society. I have seen my three year-old girl reciting to me how men are supposed to sit with their legs open swinging legs in all corners and how girls are supposed to sit humbling themselves and not looking straight in people's eyes. She further describes to me how they (girls) are not supposed to do big and challenging tasks like carrying heavy toys because they are meant for boys.

This I have never mentioned to her but to my surprise she has already picked it from the socialisation spaces probably the school or church. These gender stereotypes ultimately contribute to the inability of most of women and girls to realise their full potential especially the less privileged even when there is effective representation of women in leadership in various top positions. The socialisation spaces are the first teachers and implementers of laws. Henceforth, if they don't understand and appreciate these laws and policies, they will teach boys and girls the norms and values which they understand socialisation experience and will thus maintain the status quo.

My idea here is that social stabilisation and development requires the society to appreciate individual capacities and natural talents of each individual despite their sex, race or place of origin if we are to realise equitable development. We should acknowledge that God did not place talent in a single sex, religion or tribe. For Uganda to achieve the desired development as per the set goals and agenda in the Vision 2040, communities must all be sensitised to let all children; both boys and girls have an equal space to exploit their full potential. We might be missing out on a Ugandan who will be the first to go to the sun who in this case was created as a woman. Hence forth the government should enforce their role of creating equal spaces for both boys and girls at all levels. That is the only way we will be able to exploit our resources especially the human capital which is the most valuable resource for any nation to develop.

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