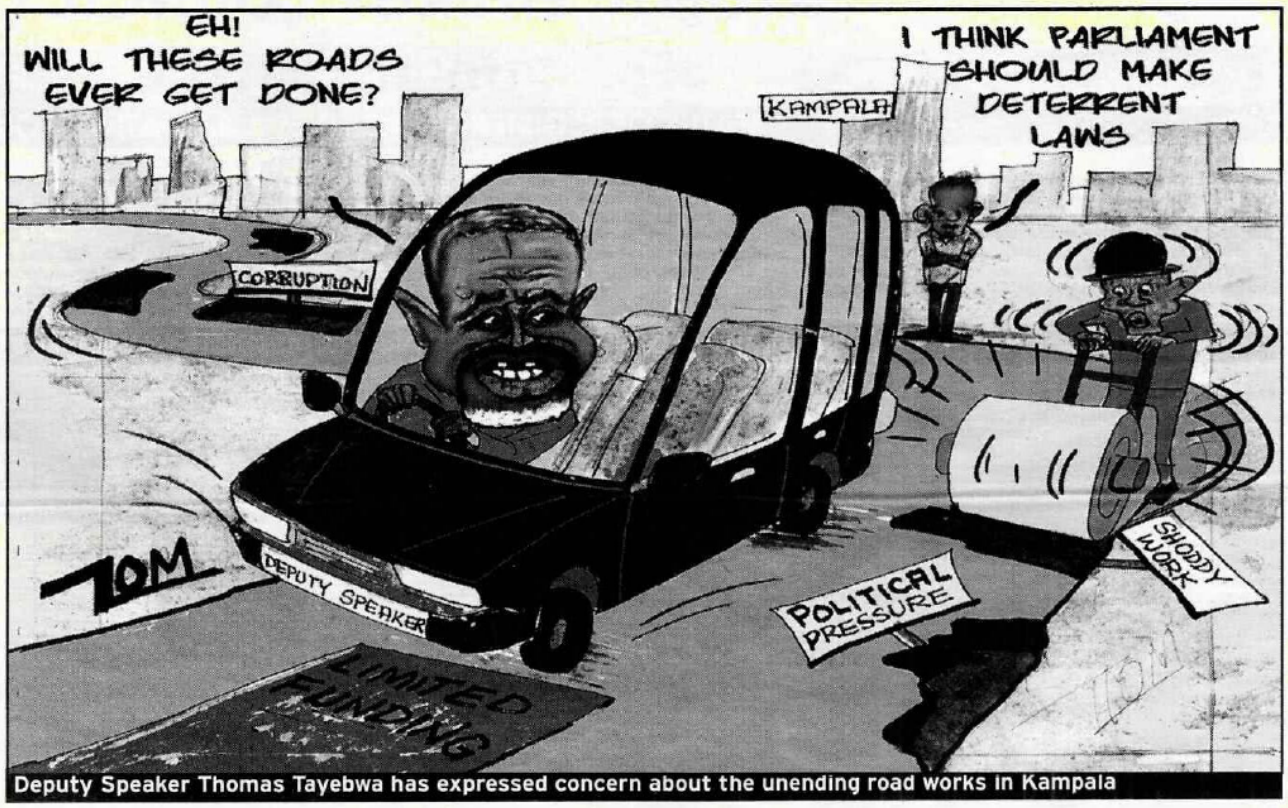


Deputy Speaker Thomas Tayebwa has expressed concern about the unending road works in Kampala

Women's Day: Let us fight stereotypes, exclusion



STEPHEN ASIIMWE

As International Women's Day on March 8 has been marked for more than a century, the first being in 1911. The day is meant to honour women, our mothers, celebrate their achievements, and focus attention on the continuous challenges they face in realising their fullest potential and their equity with men. It is the day to recommit everyone to the motto: "Women's rights are human rights."

It is not just Women's Day, even if that is how it is popularly celebrated. It is about gender awareness, and the economic and democratic struggle to make the world a better place for all its inhabitants – both men and women. The fact is that women have made tremendous advances globally, and particularly in Uganda under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government, where women have participated in every sphere of the country.

In the recently concluded elections, we have seen the number of women competing with men increase, in addition to the positions accorded to them by the Constitution. Women and girls constitute over 60% of our population compared to men and boys, as per the census. Cultural beliefs, traditional practices of not allowing women to own land and property, and socio-economic disparities continue to affect women in our societies.

Since the 1995 World Conference for Women, the Beijing Conference, the global agenda for gender equality has been significantly advanced by promoting women's economic rights and independence. It is worth noting that the NRM Government promulgated the Constitution in 1995 as well, making it a double win for women in Uganda. Article 33 states that women shall be accorded the same dignity of the person as men. However, because of male chauvinism, the implementation of this constitutional provision has been a challenge in most sectors, most especially in financial inclusion. Most women do not own land, which means they lack collateral, which most financial institutions require in order to access credit or financial services.

In 2013, the African Development Bank defined financial inclusion as encompassing all initiatives that render formal financial services available, accessible, and affordable to all. This involves addressing the needs of populations historically excluded from the formal financial sector by factors such as income levels and volatility, gender, geographical location, type of activity, or level of financial literacy.

Uganda has witnessed significant progress since the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution. Women have been given space in all spheres of life, and the Government has continued to implement diverse measures aimed at alleviating and ultimately eradicating poverty among women. The Parish Development Model, which has seven pillars, has been fully domesticated at the parish level, with 30% of the participating population required to be women. What remains is to intensify mobilisation and financial literacy training for the participating groups. This will help women generate income and enable their children to access education, healthcare, and water. Such empowerment motivates women to be more creative, innovative, and capable of utilising available opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

To our pioneer Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, who dared to dream of running for the highest office, we celebrate you. To the Mifumbira Makebas who have taught us the richness of our culture, to those who tirelessly work on our farms, ensuring our homes and communities are fed, to the nurses and midwives through whose hands life is brought into the world, and to the frontline workers who provided, and continue to provide health services in hospitals: you are an inspiration to the next generation of African women.

Your diversity and togetherness make you exceptional as African women. We salute those who have been elected; we await your contribution with anticipation. It is possible to work towards the realisation of our goals if we mobilise more women into focused leadership and create an enabling environment for them.

The writer is a Pan-Africanist