



NJOKI KARUOYA } GENDER AGENDA

• Bold • Provocative • Sassy • Insightful •
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Power of Education

Uncovering myths through learning

Everyone has heard of the cliché; “educate a woman and you educate the nation”; so much so that it no longer rings true to some. Its monotonous use over time has made people become indifferent to its meaning, which nevertheless remains true.

Men are great at adventure and discovery. The way they were wired by God, men are adept at taking major risks, some of which appear foolhardy, but should their ventures see the light at the end of the tunnel, then the world is better, or worse for it. Due to the risks and initiatives taken by men (seeing as the world has operated under patriarchal systems for millennia), we have enjoyed the fruits of development on one hand, and the pain of their reckless egos on the other.

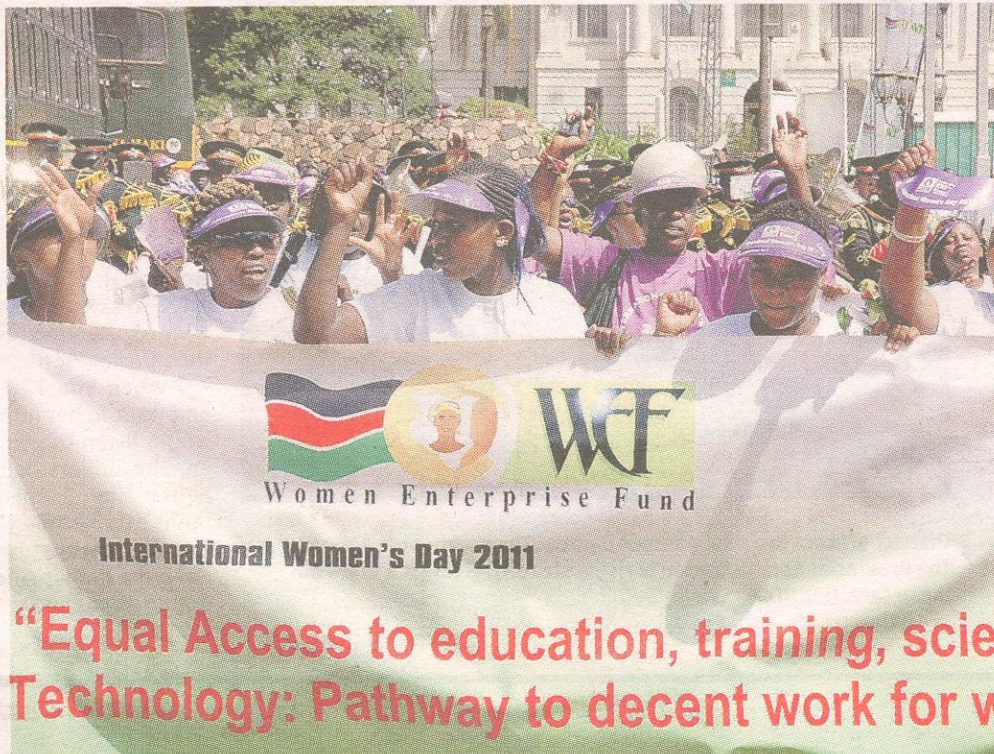
Women, on the other hand, are calmer and more nurturing. They are also very trusting and in most cases, are happy to leave their destinies in the hands of their men.

SECOND FIDDLE

That is why in the beginning of time, women were happy playing second fiddle to their men who happily and courageously embraced their roles as heads of homesteads, protectors and breadwinners. Even the cultural norms and values created by community elders were designed for the good of all its members.

With time, however, these cultural norms and values have been abused and instead of perpetuating the good for all, they have been selfishly tweaked to endear benefits towards one gender, while the other is its slave.

Any time a group of people is suppressed, whether it is a gender, a tribe, a race or



Women marched in Nairobi to celebrate International Women's Day yesterday. The world marked 100 years of analysing the challenges women continue to face, and the milestones made thus far.

[PHOTO: JOHN ABUOK/STANDARD]

citizens, anger and frustration is bound to well up. Eventually, no matter how long it takes, this anger and frustration will boil over and lead to protests, rebellions and revolts. History has proved this time and again.

Is it any wonder then, that women have for decades styled revolts against male supremacy? If a woman is happy, she will not lift a finger to usurp the gender balance of power. However, if she is abused and mistreated, if she is made to feel worthless and powerless, or worked like a donkey without any gratitude and made to feel filthy, useless and is degraded all the time, then eventually she will explode if not die.

Incidentally, any man who is treated thus, especially by his leaders, will also revolt.

This is how struggles for independence over the years were fanned and democracy came into being.

MYRIAD POSSIBILITIES

A revolt without education is, however, meaningless. Education allows people's minds to open up and discover the truth and the myriad possibilities available.

“Education helps men and women differentiate between myth/superstition and the truth. Women are exposed now and more men need to appreciate this.”

Education helps men and women differentiate between myth/superstition and the truth. It is what opened the eyes of our forefathers to the truth that the white man was as human as they were, and that the only difference between them was the colour of the skin. This is the same realisation that women over the years have come to grasp — that men are just as human as they are, albeit with a tweaked physiology and physical shape.

Further, education inspires the courage to discover as the world no longer looks threatening but full of possibilities, and the farther people go in search of knowledge, the more they get into contact with other people who do not live like them or adhere to their cultural beliefs, yet they continue

NEVER TURN BACK

I urge communities that practice retrogressive cultural practices to discard them and ensure that their children secure equal opportunities. I am here to tell you that women of Kenya have woken up, determined never to turn back, forge ahead and occupy their space in the national development of this nation and beyond. Women, this is the time!

Gender minister Naomi Shaban in her speech at the International Women's Day event

to survive needlessly.

With more education, people begin to appreciate and can make choices to change their lifestyles. This is what has fuelled immigration and emigration patterns and the clamour for gender equality and equity.

Women are exposed and more men need to appreciate that the world is changing and they can no longer continue to abuse women and expect them to remain meek and submissive.

Fellow women, take your daughters and nieces to school, which is the pathway to true freedom through opening of the mind and economic empowerment.

This was the driving force behind the celebration of International Women's Day that was celebrated yesterday worldwide. ■