



NJOKI KARUOYA } GENDER AGENDA

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Reproductive Health

Let's be clear here: No pad-No vote

Two weeks ago, I attended the launch of the Prime Minister's Roundtable on Gender Equality and Equity. I must admit that Raila Odinga is the consummate politician, always prepared to address his audience and tell them exactly what they want to hear.

Already, the Prime Minister hosts quarterly roundtables with the private sector, the youth and trade unions. This was the first roundtable the Prime Minister was holding with individuals and organisations that agitate for the rights of women and children. Accompanying him were a few ministers, assistant ministers and MPs.

The Prime Minister said many nice things that got the women ululating and applauding every few minutes, but the one that almost got him a standing ovation was when he directed the ministries of Finance, Education, and Public Health and Sanitation to quickly resolve the issue of providing all school-going girls in primary and secondary schools with sanitary pads.

BUDGET READING

This directive is expected to take effect in about a month's time and today, as I eagerly anticipate the contents of the Government's annual budget reading, I want to hear how much the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has set aside for this necessary item, because I know just how easy it is for politicians to make statements that please the electorate yet they have no intention of fulfilling them.

Already, there are several initiatives started by many women and organisations to dispense sanitary pads to girls in schools. In many ar-



As the budget is read today, women are hungry and angry, as this woman demonstrated early this week when she joined others to agitate for a people-friendly budget. (PHOTO: EVANS HABIL/STANDARD)

remote areas, girls don't even wear panties, leave alone the sanitary pads, so when they go through their monthly menstruation, school is abandoned for about a week.

What that eventually amounts to is about 12 weeks of not going to school, and consequently their grades are negatively affected.

Government provision of sanitary pads will dramatically reverse this situation. Considering the initiative has received the stamp of approval from the highest office, it will be grave if the Finance minister ignores the directive for whatever reason.

The relevant ministries tied to this initiative should also be creative so that the conventional sanitary pads are not the only option. In the rural

organisations that have devised 'permanent' pads that can be washed and rewound.

Others come shaped like panties so they play a dual role, which is to provide the girls with items they critically need.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Another important statement by the Prime Minister is his assurance that the Government's division of labour in line with affirmative action will be stringently effected, especially at the higher management levels where women are few, sometimes even nil.

Again, this announcement was received with warm applause and ululation, but as always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

There is progress thus far.

sion has presented a male Chief Justice and a female Deputy Chief Justice for approval. That's a great step.

Now we want to see a real shake-up in all administrative levels and sectors of Government to ensure the 30 per cent rule is implemented. Otherwise I will come to the conclusion that the Prime Minister's Roundtable on Gender Equality and Equity is nothing but a public relations vehicle to ascend to the presidency in 2012 on the backs of women.

I would like to think that women have progressively become more aware of their surroundings and are able to differentiate between myth and reality. Furthermore, with the increased space for women's participation, I would also like to believe that this 'fair'

TREASURY MONEY FOR PADS

"Starting July 1, sanitary towels must be provided to all schools. It is unacceptable for girls to drop out of school due to lack of sanitary pads thereby making them vulnerable."

Prime Minister Raila Odinga

articulate their issues and concerns.

Therefore, politicians, including the Prime Minister, need to be warned; that with a more empowered class of women, the days of fooling this constituency with sweet words, so that they faithfully line up behind leaders even when they fail to deliver the promises and pledges, are fast disappearing.

By 2012, women shall be more critical of politicians and will measure their viability for the top seat only by their actions and results.

Thus I look forward to a massive sanitary pad rollout by Government in three weeks time, together with a dramatic increase in the number of women managers and administrators at the top