

Editorial

The need for political awareness for Africa's younger generation

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PART 1

Is it democracy that in Africa, where majority of its population are below forty years old, elect majority of its leaders, who are above sixty years of age, to power? Are we really satisfied with the way our countries are being governed by leaders of that age group whom are not in touch with the realities/expectations of the moment? Take for example, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Cameroun, Malawi and Liberia where the heads of government are at the ages of eighty-six, eighty-three, seventy-nine, seventy-six and seventy five. Should it not bother us that at the age people generally take retirement and rest, our politicians actually become eligible to be at the helm of affairs? Why is it that people below forty are considered as political kids? Our nations desperately need young leaders who personify energy, enthusiasm, morality, and diligence. No doubt we have progressed a lot in the last fifty years or so, but the development pace would have been completely different had some young torchbearers led this process of development.

It is next to impossible to find a young partisan politician with no political family background in the furor of politics. There can be two reasons for this.

One may be that the youth today are not interested in actively participating in the political field. They are content with what they are doing and how the country is being governed. But this reason seems to hold no ground seeing the discontent shown by this generation of youths. The young generations today, are aware of the problems facing our nations and the world at large. Given a chance they would be ready to change the political condition of the country for the better. This takes us to the second reason.

The second reason may be that young people are not given opportunities to prove themselves on the alleged basis that they are not equipped with experience to participate actively in the governance of the continent. This reason seems to be more logical seeing the monopoly of old leaders in almost all the major political parties across the divide. Old people should realize that proper development could take place only when they make way for younger people to take control of the activities. It is not intended to mean that old people should leave the political scene and retire. What is appropriate is that they should be there but for guidance.

Until the generation of teens and young adults decide to engage in political leadership, we have no place to complain of bad leaders and bad governance in Africa. This is because persons now in their late sixties and seventies, who have been involved in politics since the early sixties, at the time most of Africa acquired her independence from her colonial masters, our fathers who fought for her liberation, are still the persons in government today. And why is this so? It is so because the younger generation have left governance through political means to them. As such, these older generation who have been in governance for all these years, have always had a fill, rotating positions of leadership amongst themselves. In those days, post independence era in Africa, we had Heads of Governments in their early thirties, government ministers in their twenties etc. And now in their late sixties and seventies, they are still governing the continent, making relevant decisions to protect their interest etc. And then they claim that is so, because the younger generation are inexperienced, nor ready.

PART 2

With reference to discussions in the first part of this write up, it was stated that on the continent, we have two major categories of politicians. The first being the older generation in their sixties and seventies who still engage in partisan politics, and run for political offices as well as seek appointments. This, they claim is so because the younger generation are inexperienced, nor ready. This category of our older political leaders, were used to forcefully and violently taking power, this they learned during their quest for the independence of our nations in the 1950s – 1960s. And as such, believe this is the only way to take over power, by violence if the need arises, instilling a kind of do or die necessity of fear in the minds of their opposition.

In this regard, take for example, Zimbabwe where the head of government at 86 years old, who fought for her independence, served as Prime Minister from 1980 to 1987, and then head of state from 1987 till date, 32 years on and yet he is to be a candidate in the upcoming elections. Or is it Cameroun, where the head of government at the age of seventy-nine, was Prime minister from 1975 to 1982, then President from 1982 till date, that is 37 years. How old are we today, why do we let this happen all around us?

In situations where this is not the case, the younger generation who are not capable of excelling well in school as well as who are unemployed, then seek to get in bed with such politicians as their aides, and therefore learn the crude ways of politics, from the older politicians in the crudest manners possible. They get involved in the political process, as a means to an end. As such we then begin to see all sorts of educationally unqualified persons, persons with no standards of morals nor ethics, having to represent us and make laws for us to be governed by. A simple example is the suspended Youth Leader of the African National Congress of South Africa, amongst others. This is the case.

Such persons who then get involved in the political process, do this not as a yearning to govern, not of sincerity of purpose to lead or need to serve their nation, but as a means to get employed and seek some reckoning of sort. Whereas this is the case for this persons, those successful youths who excel in college, finish from the Ivy League schools and their types, get to work for multinational corporations, international organisations etc. Children of the elite in Africa refuse to get involved in the political process. And why is that, mostly because they hear of such gory stories during the election process. Stories of people been attacked, maimed and killed in some instances. They are not encouraged by anyone on the need to get politically active and desire for changing the process.

As a result, we then assume that politics is for the

gangsters, the dodgy folks, the scum of society, etc. We leave governance to be determined by the same individuals we write off as social miscreants. Same individuals, who are supposedly scum of society, end up being our political leaders. As such, they govern the way we live our lives, and the way the general public and the world perceive us Africans. But you know what, we still don't care, and why is that? Maybe for the reason that regardless of how bad the situation is in our respective nations, we can still travel the world, enjoy dual citizenships; work abroad for multinational organisations receiving fat pay cheques, enjoy the luxuries of organised societal values. We forget to think, how is this possible here and not back at home? Is it because we cannot see nor sit back to think?

How can we, then say, we have bad governments all over Africa? What right do we have to say Africa is the way it is because of our leaders. And that they lack integrity, not accountable to anyone but themselves etc. Of course they would be accountable only to themselves. After all, we let them to because no one cares, but yet we have the numbers. We do not show sufficient interest in the electoral process by getting involved. And until we decide to get involved, and by this it is meant running for elected offices, then we can say we are moving in the right direction.

Until this generation of youngsters decide to take over power forcefully, politically, then there would be no hope for change for a very long time. We need people in governance like our selves, accountable to us, to be judged by us, who are afraid of the consequences of negative outcomes. As for the younger generation, we can contribute in more ways than just contesting elections. Much can be done in areas like educating people, raising awareness about various social ills, the implications of knowingly voting the wrong person in due to sentimental attachments, or not voting at all, because there is no hope.

It is hoped that the more we get involved, then, the next time we go to the polls to vote, we definitely will find more names of youngsters who can make our nations better governed according to the rules of law, ethical and moral standards. This is happening in some places. Look at examples of Roosevelt Skeritt of the Dominican Republic, who was elected Member of Parliament at the age of 27, and then at the age of 31, elected Prime Minister in 2004, a position he still serves. Or is it Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar, who was elected Mayor with 63.3% of votes at age 33, and then became President at age 35.

What are the rest of us waiting for? Can you not see it is possible and must happen if we must move along with the rest of the world? Youngsters wake up and take your place. Power is never given, infact, it is taken.