

Simple Interventions Female Governors may do to Reduce Gender Disparities in Access to Land

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Female Governors

The new government, at national and county level, is now in place. Congratulations to the office holders. Of the 47 County governors, seven, just about 15 per cent, are women. My colleagues from Rwanda remind me that, comparatively, this is still dismal. They brag of a better record. But for a country that started with an all male cast after the 2013 elections, this new record motivates.

Given this skewed statistic, the women governors have quite a challenge, particularly in helping to bridge disparities in access to land and related rights, and creating benchmarks for posterity. Let me amplify. Land is a key factor of production. Kenya's economy is dominantly agrarian. The 2022 Economic Survey reflects that agriculture accounted for 22.4 per cent of Kenya's GDP in 2021. Evidently, compared to other development sectors, agriculture therefore dominates. Equitable access to land and land use would therefore help to level up economic disparities countrywide.

Contribution of women to agriculture

National statistics show that women play a most significant role in agricultural production, accounting for approximately 75 per cent of the labour force. Ironically, only about 5 per cent of title deeds in Kenya are held jointly by women and men, while only about 1 per cent are exclusively held by women. Furthermore, cultural practices in most parts of Kenya limit women access and control of land use rights. This is the context within which women governors will hold tenure for the next five years. So it behooves them, even much more than their male counterparts, to intervene and bridge this gap. This may be done in simple but high impact

ways.

Gender inclusion: simple interventions

It's assumed that since our policy, constitution and laws are gender inclusive, matters of discrimination will be routinely addressed. This isn't so. Many women in the rural, and even urban areas, are totally unaware of their rights. Yet they continue to suffer. So simple initiatives anchored around the county government to escalate pertinent information to women at all levels, and the wider community amplifying the benefits of gender inclusion, would help. The introduction of an advisory desk, manned by a dedicated team of experts who would guide women on how to intervene in challenges relating to access and ownership would therefore be most handy. In doing so, such a desk would liaise with land registries, land control boards and, where they exist, panels of traditional elders who hold sway over access and ownership of land.

Governors may also wish to try and generate baseline county statistics on male and women land ownership, and work to improve them within their tenure. This would promote consciousness about the gap, and help to galvanize action. It would also help if the governors liaised with the national government to ensure gender inclusion in all land governance organs, including land control boards. Women sitting in such organs must however be sufficiently empowered in order to meaningfully and confidently contribute to any deliberations and decisions made.

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