

UPHOLD QUALIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS IN PUBLIC RECRUITMENT

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I was pretty thrilled in one of the London pubs years back as Kenyan after another bagged gold, silver or bronze in a Commonwealth Games meet held in the Far East. In some races, the entire set of medals went to Kenyans. But in my excitement, I had forgotten this wasn't home when a towering chap from the Midlands in England, as if issuing a decree, loudly said, "It's high time these Kenyans were kept off these middle and long distance races during Commonwealth Games. At this rate, our Athletes will die off without ever winning medals!" The pub went aflame with cheer.

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Much as I empathized, I felt I needed to handle this somewhat. Since this guy was from my College, I gathered courage and with utmost humility said, "But that would be discrimination. Kenyans are winning by merit. After all, there are so many other things the English and the wider West lock us out in and we haven't complained". That only prolonged our session in there as the merits and demerits of these opposed positions suffered interrogation.

I didn't ever expect I would require to confront this philosophy in reverse right here at home. But I had to recently. Like in the London pub moment, I was equally humbled. Here came a young graduate who had done quite well in his studies at JKUAT who happily declared that he had

applied for a job in one of the government Departments lucky to have had authority to recruit and looked forward to recruitment. Since he had passed well, I was equally convinced he'd fare well. Two months later, he was back. This time looking rather low. He hadn't qualified. Then I remembered that the Department into which he expected recruitment was heavy with officers from his ethnic group. I shared my concern with him. He then looked up and what he said next stung. "So that could be the reason why two other guys I had beaten in College were recruited while I was left out?" he wondered aloud. "Why did I then have to work harder in College; did I choose my place of birth? Why must I miss a job when I am better qualified?" he continued. This was a young Kenyan whose emotions I needed to contain. I did what I could and I believe he will soon get entry into formal employment. But didn't he state a case close to what had been suggested in the UK.....illogical discrimination?

And what Kenya is experiencing as recruitments into the office of the DPP is equally informative. Pertinent issues notwithstanding, some in the political class have been quoted invoking issues like "minority", "discrimination" and a whole lot of other rather strange invocations. Again here, such an argument digresses from the core concerns on a matter like this that hangs on integrity, issues of ethnicity, County or party affiliation aside. Such voices are actually jeopardizing the candidate's case since perhaps left to fight his battles, he would do a much better job and ride over the accusations. But the ranting invoking other considerations is clouding matters without addressing the core issue here. And it isn't any different from the London pubs'. It's a herd thing either deliberately or inadvertently hitting far wide of the real issue.

Kenya truly has issues of ethnic disparities in public recruitment. Kenya has issues of inequitable distribution of resources. Kenya has issues with unqualified people, or people of questionable integrity in public office on account of political patronage. These are matters that must be well addressed going forward. But in doing so, we mustn't compromise reason and objectivity. And we mustn't let anyone get away with invoking the mob or herd approach. It is important that we ensure that good qualifications, innovation and hard work are rewarded, regardless of one's area of origin. Just like the best American in music, art or technology isn't shut out because he comes from Washington or New York, we mustn't lock out our best for coming from Bondo, Baringo or Nyeri where the big boys come from. These are Kenyans who have earned their merit. And we mustn't have our best locked out because they are from Nyanza, Rift Valley, Nairobi or Central which together count for the bulk of people in public service. If you attempt to, how do you convince the young man above to continue working hard or harder in such circumstances? If he came out best, he must be able to see equivalent dividends in life, not observe in wonder as colleagues who he outperformed wave their appointment letters just because they come from different regions.

And where issues of integrity are raised on any one of us, let us address them directly ourselves

within context. Let the political class and others who wish to enslave communities spare Kenya the ignominy of unsubstantiated generalized statements like exclusion, discrimination and political maneuver for their sake. Otherwise we could as well allow the rest of the world to “keep Kenyans out” for a while so that other nationalities could win medals in middle and long distance running in their lifetime.

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