

Why the next Lands Cabinet Secretary should Prioritise the "Ardhisasa" Portal

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New government

Polling for Kenya's fifth President and members of the 13th parliament, along with the third cohort of County Governors and County Assembly members, will happen next week Tuesday 9th

August. I appeal for efficient and peaceful voting, and, subsequently, thorough, accurate and transparent tallying of the vote. I am just back from an engagement with the East African Community in Dar es Salaam and I could easily tell that East Africa, and indeed Africa, has eyes on Kenya. Let's therefore demonstrate that our democracy has come of age, and provide those watching us with a good comparative benchmark and hope.

Following these polls and the subsequent transition of government, we shall have a new Cabinet Secretary in the Lands Ministry. I keep recounting the importance of this docket to our government and others in the region. Lands Ministries oversee the distribution of the land resource, and the custody and management of related records. The efficiency or inefficiency of this Ministry therefore affects the huge real estate portfolio, food security, the extraction of natural resources and the delivery of physical infrastructure projects. The Ministry therefore has huge development and security implications for any state. Ministers to Lands Ministries should therefore be very carefully selected, and they need to understand the weight of the responsibility bestowed upon them.

Prioritise Ardhisasa system

So what's the one thing the next Cabinet Secretary for the Lands Ministry must expeditiously address? The ardhisasa online land management system! This is a key transaction highway. I

have and will continue to be a proponent of this system. Because it's good for Kenya; it's good for business. Indeed, it's late in time. I am happy the outgoing Cabinet Secretary Farida Karoney has been a relentless champion for the system. That helped a great deal. But Ardhisasa has issues. And they will not go until comprehensively addressed, the public relations associated with its development notwithstanding.

Stakeholder dissatisfaction

It should for instance worry government that the Law Society of Kenya had called for a public demonstration last Wednesday to echo frustrations with the system. It took a long meeting between its leadership, the leadership of the Institution of Surveyors of Kenya and the Lands Ministry for the demo to be called off. But this is temporary relief. Unfortunately, the government appears unable to get the drift of the underlying issues. They are common on social media platforms of the key professional and business associations. One easily picks it from staff in Ardhi house and the Survey Field Headquarters in Ruaraka too. However, while the professionals have kept compiling and forwarding their concerns for action, staff in the Ministry remain resigned and laid back, with some openly stating that perhaps only the looming transition will unlock the situation.

The new boss in Lands must therefore seize this mood and listen to all unconditionally. Even if remedial action calls for revisiting some of the policy assumptions and parameters in the technical design, let that be.

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