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Numerous Opportunities Exist in a More Sober and Healthier Nation

By Mwangi Wanjumbi

During the festive season, there have certainly been numerous opportunities and threats to business and lifestyles too. One of the key drivers of the changed situation is the new alcohol laws, parts of which seem to have been re-introduced but in more stringent forms. These laws are naturally well intended and good for the national situation, despite being a serious threat to many businesses. Informal attempts of ascertaining how the laws are affecting the various stakeholders bring out some interesting scenarios.

Key of them all is an amazing episode noticed during a tour of the rural countryside. In the past, it has been difficult to meet Mureu while on his feet. He has almost been a permanent resident of his favorite drinking joint somewhere in the hinterland of Karatina Town. The only semblance of sober moments for Mureu who is in his 30's, have seemingly been when en-route to the bar after short rests in his house, which is just a few minutes of staggering distance. This time, he has had no choice but to get home immediately after 11 pm. Against his will, he has had to stick home up-to 5.00 pm the following day, therefore being forced into involuntary soberness. Whether Mureu will be gainfully employed during the pro-longed soberness is yet to be fathomed.

Mwendia is on the other hand an exited bar business owner. He and his staff are no longer working endless hours serving sometimes irritating customers like Mureu. Instead, customers start arriving shortly after 5.00 pm ready to be served for only about 6 hours, especially during weekdays. According to Mwendia, the customers are seemingly gainfully employed in their farms and businesses and therefore more liquid than in the past. More still, they get time to feed well therefore whetting their appetite with even heavier drink doses.

Consequently, the beer sales are better for Mwendia than has been the case before. This scenario is replicated by Harun, a bar owner somewhere in East-lands, Nairobi. He has no qualms with the new laws since they have so far not affected his business negatively. Particularly, he is excited that customers end up going home before some of them get into drunken stupors, which sometimes lead to stressful situations.

Certainly, not all beer businesses are positively affected by the new laws. Moses, who has invested heavily in a beer business situated in an up market locality, is no longer at peace with his experiences. Beer sales have dropped substantially. Many customers have in the past been flocking from elsewhere to patronize his pub especially after 11.00 pm. However, it is no longer viable for customers to relocate to night joints especially in the estates. They could easily land into police cells and subsequently pay hefty fines.

Nonetheless, all is not lost for both the beer consumers and sellers. It is imperative that we focus on the positive attributes likely to be achieved once the new laws become a way of life. The restrictive drinking hours appear to have been re-instated after having been conveniently abandoned over time. We need therefore to look for the opportunities therein, instead of condemning the same and even plotting their deregulation.

Specifically, we need to appreciate the fact that, there has been hue and cry over the many societal challenges that have been linked to overindulgence in beer. Here, it does not matter whether we are referring to hard and illicit drinks or ordinary beers. In any case, hard drinking ordinarily graduates from normal drinking. It is from this drinking that we have witnessed family challenges including reduced birth rates especially in some areas of Central Kenya – news on occurrences in Mukurweini are still fresh in our minds. The same drinking habits have led to incapacitation of many Youths who would otherwise be contributing to nation building especially as part of the labor force.

In urban centers, it is notable that many hours are spent in bars any time, people are not at work. Incidentally, cultural studies decry the Africans' concept of 'killing time' compared to the west where time is spent (hopefully wisely for that matter). In the process of killing time, overindulgence in alcohol consumption has led to increased stress and poor productivity in the workplace. Further, lives have continually been lost through dangerous driving that is attributable to the same overindulgence in alcohol consumption. On the other hand, incidences of stress related diseases such as high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks have been reported to be on the increase.

Evidently therefore, it may not be insensitive to use legal means as encouragement of or even enforcement of a more sober and healthier society. Those whose businesses have been adversely affected need to look out for new opportunities. In fact, there are numerous business opportunities available to us, if only we can engage in a process of thinking outside the box. Actually, it may be more beneficial to work around change than to fight the same.

Inevitably, existing bar business owners need to become more creative and initiate new ventures, therefore treating the former as part-time occupations, if at all they must be retained. After, all beer drinking will now be largely possible only after normal day-time working hours, especially in a working nation.

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