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Is the boy child now endangered?

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When I first heard of Maendeleo Ya Wanaume Organisation, some years ago, I did not give it much thought just like most other Kenyans. I thought it was just another outfit that was out to attract one form of donor funding or the other. Alternatively, I imagined the founder was another attention seeker gearing for competition with women who are adherents of an organisation bearing a closely related name.

But, a recent occurrence somewhere in Maasai land has got me cracking my head. Inconceivably, young Maasai morans invaded a girls' school seeking to acquire life partners most likely guided by the existing cultural practices.

Though the invasion was nipped in the bud, the need was not addressed in any way. So, what happens to other youngsters elsewhere who may have similar needs that they are unable to express openly like the morans? Could we be sitting on a time bomb waiting to explode?

In that realisation, which has now been enhanced by the experience of the morans, I am honestly influenced to perceive the Maendeleo ya Wanaume organisation differently. Despite having never met this organisation's founder, I now tend to think that he seemingly had a vision, which was then not obvious to most other men and even women. Could he have foreseen the escalations of the tribulations of the boy child?

Perhaps yes, but we may need to reflect backwards for us to appreciate the ongoing trends. Those who were in Nairobi in 1985 may still recall how the city was swamped by thousands of women who had travelled from far and wide to attend the International Women's Congress, Nairobi Chapter. Nothing like that had happened in Kenya before, therefore the deserved excitement. This congress may somehow have signified the beginning of the total empowerment of women in Kenya, especially in solidarity with other global women.

Affirmative action in favour of women and the girl child became a national chorus. Our mothers, sisters and daughters started getting sympathetic treatment in almost all spheres of life. The same has culminated to preferential treatment in employment, schools, leadership and other national situations.

Indeed, the women's voice has been heard loudly and clearly even to the extent of being treated preferentially by the new Constitution. Never mind that all this has been happening at a time that the women continue asserting their equality with men. This may not be bad for the feminine gender, but it may have come at a price, which may be dear to the entire society.

As the fortunes for the girl child continue on the upward trend, those of the boy child continue nose diving. Too much attention on the girl child has in other words given rise to some imbalance, which may not be interesting to the society. Even though the said attention may not be the only contributing factor, it has led to some element of intimidation for the boy child. Why say this?

Recent media reports indicated that there are more women employees than men in four government ministries in Kenya. Further, most HR practitioners have noticed that any time a job is advertised especially in professional situations, the tendency is that most applicants end up being women. And even previously male dominated vocations are no longer a challenge to women. Chances of success in job placements are therefore skewed towards women. Where does that leave the boy child? More importantly, what else could be contributing to this scenario?

Apparently, one of the greatest contributors to the challenging position of the boy child is the decline of our value systems. The worst of them all is that, we have become a money driven society. There is nothing wrong with money and wealth as such. But there is everything wrong in how we strategise on acquiring this wealth. We probably need to learn a few tips from the Americans who we share a common attribute of loving material wealth.

The difference however is that Americans treat money making as a process, which must be supported by strong work ethics. Wealth must result from focused work efforts, through known careers and vocations unless it is inherited. Unsupported wealth will lead an American into the wrong side of the law. That may include investigations and eventual punishment through jails and other punitive measures. In our society, all that matters is simply acquiring wealth. The route does not matter much. In any case those that are financially endowed have largely been able to find their way around the law.

Naturally, throwing work ethics out of the window has led to some undesirable repercussions. The boy child is generally becoming helpless and confused in many situations. When unable to pursue academic excellence particularly, the boy child has become a victim of the culture of get rich quick. They generally seek ways of acquiring wealth as a means of guaranteeing their place in the society. When that does not work, they venture into crime and drugs and other societal vices. Others simply lapse into depression.

Alternatively, when they secure employment, they are in a hurry to become wealthy. They tend to follow shortcuts aiming to acquire the much desired wealth. The boy child feels that it is the only way he will win the hand and trust of the girl child, whose status in the society has continually been rising beyond his reach. Has the society not therefore created the predicaments of the boy child? And, are there ways out of this?

Effectively, we have no choice but to go back to the drawing board. We need the boy child just like we need the girl child, for successful continuity of the society.

Actually, we need to go back to our societal values. We need to re-define them right from the individual to the family unit; from organizational units to the national situation. The time to do that is now. Somehow, our new constitution will most likely accommodate developments, which will nurture a value guided society more than ever before, if properly implemented.

Meanwhile, the boy child just like the girl needs to be encouraged to become the best in what he could be good at. Let each of them be developed through purposeful education as well. That is what will add value to the improvement of humanity, as each child pursues what they would want in life. Let us be guided by Mahatma Gandhi's wisdom to the effect that, "You must be the change that you wish to see in the world."

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