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‘Dark week’ tells why we need national values

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This week, I am sad and happy at the same time. I am saddened by the more than 100 lives that have been needlessly lost at the Sinai fire tragedy. I am further saddened by the suffering of those who are recuperating in hospitals and homes courtesy of injuries that should never have occurred. In that regard, I extend my sympathies to the relatives of the dead and the injured as well. More sadness is occasioned by the many lives that have been lost in Ruiru and Nyahururu through consumption of toxic brews.

On a softer note, I am happy because of some refreshing news that has come to my attention, regarding national values. The news excites me because I have lost count of the number of published articles that I have written that create awareness on not only personal, organizational but also national and societal value systems. Notably, it is those value systems that eventually become a people’s culture or way of life.

In the same past, I have appealed to our leadership and particularly Brand Kenya to develop and publicize national values as a way of reclaiming sanity in our orientations towards life, other people’s property, work, growth and all other matters affecting us, as progressive members of the human race. Further, I have attributed most of our suffering to the numerous negative values that we continually embrace, some which can now be enumerated.

Firstly, one of our greatest challenges is what is known in cultural studies as the value of materiality. This is about money, wealth, goods and anything tangible that people are capable of owning. The less you seem to own, the less successful you would seem to be. Conversely, the more you seem to own, the more successful you seem to be. There is nothing wrong with owning as much as the world can offer. However, the same should be acquired through legal and decent means.

Ironically, most people will not care how they accumulate the materials. The society does not seemingly care either. That is why known criminals, the corrupt, drug dealers and so on will comfortably walk to church and be highly appreciated for their donations. Some will even be treated like societal heroes.

In the case of Sinai residents, they are not even the landlords. Most of them are tenants who are now the victims of the materiality value that has seemingly no respect for the sanctity of life. In fact, there are many known cases where tycoons invest in the slum structures, which have now been proven to be devastating time bombs. Even more worrying is that the same landlords are in cahoots with the provincial administration representatives who are supposed to be policy implementers.

In the case of Ruiru and Nyahururu deaths, people have decided to enrich themselves through experimenting with lives of others. Likewise, the victims have lost their meaning and purpose of life. Thus, they can do anything to probably release stress as they presumably continue occupying space in this tough world.

Secondly, our political leadership has compromised the safety of the slum dwelling mwananchi. Seemingly, they are no longer viewed as national assets who are capable of providing labour for national economic development. Thus, the political leadership has ensured that the slum dwellers stay put even where their lives are threatened, only to be used as periodical voting machines. On the other hand, the manufactures of illicit brews continue making their money as the leadership looks the other way. The process of-course goes on to entrench the political leaders' situation, which naturally attracts power and wealth.

Thirdly, some of the slum dwellers continue endangering their lives not because they are incapable of living decently, but as an extension of the village life, to the city. In fact, it may be recalled that a well paid bank employee was once publicly reported to have embraced the idea of living in the slums, so that he can support as many members of the extended family as he could.

Fourthly, the fuel industry is one of these where there should never be any letup in maintenance of almost 100% quality standards. It is therefore inconceivable that there are no control measures that would prevent fuel spillage, to the extent witnessed at Sinai slums. That goes to prove the assumption that orientation of the African people towards science and technology is considerably challenged.

In a nutshell, we need to be very concerned about our values. Technology was certainly the immediate cause of the Sinai deaths. The proximate or remote cause was no doubt the residents' exposure to the dangerous environment, especially urged on by the political order. The same was supported by the inactivity of seemingly reluctant policy implementers. Despite these very desperate trends, there seems to be a ray of hope.

The dangerous national cultures that have in turn compromised our own safety, may be toned down, especially now that many Kenyans continue being unable to chart their own values. Is it not exciting then that Brand Kenya has now formulated national values, which we are soon expected to embrace?

Incidentally, the values are as should be, independent of the criminal and civil law, which has largely been left to control our behaviors, impunity notwithstanding. Some of us look forward to not only the roll out of the national values but also their full implementation. We can only hope that we shall not have witnessed the impact of further time bombs.

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