

Beyond Elections: The Leadership Kenya Needs

Ask any Kenyan what comes to mind when they hear the word "leadership," and chances are they will immediately think of politics and elections. We have become so accustomed to discussing leadership every five years that we sometimes forget that governance is something we live with every single day.

Governance is not just about who occupies an office. It is about how decisions are made, how leaders serve the people, and whether ordinary citizens feel seen, heard, and represented. Good governance affects the roads we drive on, the schools our children attend, the healthcare we receive, the opportunities available to our youth, and even the level of trust we have in our institutions.

The truth is, leadership does not begin on election day, and it certainly should not end there.

One of the greatest gifts Kenya has ever given itself is the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. It was more than a legal or political achievement; it was a promise. A promise that leadership would be exercised with integrity, accountability, transparency, and public participation. It envisioned a country where power would ultimately belong to the people and where public office would truly mean public service.

Yet, more than a decade later, many Kenyans still feel disconnected from governance. We complain about corruption, poor service delivery, and unfulfilled promises, but we rarely ask ourselves an equally important question: What role do we, as citizens, play in building the kind of leadership we want to see?

Democracy is not simply about casting a vote. It is about remaining engaged long after the ballot boxes have been packed away. It is asking questions when things are not working. It is attending public participation forums. It is understanding our rights and responsibilities. Most importantly, it is refusing to become indifferent to the issues that affect our communities.

For far too long, leadership has been treated as a privilege reserved for a few. We celebrate political victories but often pay little attention to competence, character, and service. Somewhere along the way, politics became more about personalities than principles.

As a country, we need to begin asking different questions. Are our leaders accessible? Do they understand the realities facing ordinary citizens? Are they committed to delivering

results? Are they accountable for the promises they make? Leadership should never be reduced to popularity contests or political affiliations. It should be measured by impact.

At the same time, we must challenge the notion that governance is only for politicians. Teachers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, community leaders, young people, and professionals from all walks of life have an important role to play in shaping our society. Leadership is demonstrated every day through service, integrity, and the willingness to contribute positively to our communities.

Our youth, in particular, have an important role to play. Kenya is a young nation, yet many young people feel that governance is something distant and inaccessible. This must change. Young people do not have to wait until they are elected into office to become leaders. Leadership begins wherever we choose to show up with our ideas, our voices, and our actions.

We must also normalize demanding excellence from those who seek public office. It is not enough for leaders to be charismatic or relatable. They must be competent. They must understand the needs of the people they serve and have the courage and commitment to address them. Public office should never be viewed as an opportunity for personal gain, but as a responsibility entrusted by citizens.

The Kenya we want will not be built by leaders alone. It will be built by citizens who are informed, engaged, and willing to hold both themselves and their leaders to a higher standard.

Good governance is not a legal concept hidden in constitutional documents or reserved for political conversations. It is deeply personal. It affects our daily lives and shapes the future of our communities.

Leadership, after all, is not simply about winning elections. It is about building institutions that work, creating opportunities for others, and leaving society better than we found it.

Perhaps the question we should all be asking ourselves is not simply, "Who should lead us?" but also, "What kind of country are we helping to build?"

Because when leadership is rooted in service and citizens remain actively engaged, we do not just strengthen our democracy, we build the Kenya we all deserve.