

Authors: Mr Solomzi Tshona and Ms Yolokazi Mfuto

South Africa women still bear the brunt of relegation to the periphery of society in 2022.

The win by South Africa's Football team – *Banyana Banyana* in the Women's Africa Cup of Nations - WAFCON 2022 is a perfect timing as we draw close to the commemoration of Women's month. It is prudent that we constantly remember the contribution that women made in the advent of our constitutional democracy as ratified 26 years ago.

The historical march of 9th August 1956 was not only to protest the gruesome pass laws, but a struggle waged against a patriarchal, classist and racist society brought to South Africa by colonialists as presented in the Apartheid governance system. The march led by the Federation of Women in South Africa including the African National Congress Women's league brought together more than 20 000 women across the country marching to the Union Buildings. The solidarity exhibited by these women was one of the remarkable occurrences during the apartheid regime and it triumphed by destabilizing the system. The women of 1956 categorically clear posited that the effects of the pass laws will not only affect their movement, but it would yield humiliation and the arrest of women will destroy their already wrecked families. These pass laws were internal passports that restricted black people's movement and advances for new employment and limitation for urbanisation.

The march was preceded by series of petitions and demonstrations from the early 1900s, they were premised by the fact that women had borne the brunt of the pass laws, their frustrations resulted in coordinated effort and motivation garnered through the various petitions included the one presented in 1914, they took to the streets of Pretoria to submit a petition against the pass laws. Their immense dedication to fight is one that today we are appreciating the fruits of – their spirit of resilience until all apartheid system was defeated.

As we will be commemorating and reflecting in history, we must always refuse to forget the role these women have played in the struggle including the adoption of the Freedom Charter in Kliptown, 1955. The Freedom charter is the manifesto that guided, propelled, and later reflected in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996.

One of the most appalling phenomena that we are constantly subjected in South Africa is whether the country is ready to have its first female President. This question is fundamentally problematic as it seeks to divorce women from critical leadership positions and erase *them* from history. This march was an indication of women taking up space and showing the government of the time that the role of women is not only to raise children and coordinate homes – but to lead society just like their male

counterparts. This is reflected in the words of Hilary Clinton - the former secretary of the United States of America 's "When women participate in the economy, everyone benefits".

The role that we see women play in the development of our everyday lives, even during the period when only men were forced to be migrant labourer, we witnessed women managing their own farming fields, maintain their households and leading communities. These are the skills that are often forgotten and used to undermine the role of women.

Now, the win for South Africa as brought to us by our Banyana-Banyana is clear indication that South African government must take conscious decision to support women football by not only by broadcasting but financial backing just like we do with the men football team.

Furthermore, the must country prioritise that gender equality must be the order at all levels of our society. Yet, we don't see gender equality being practiced to its full extent. Our society is constituted mostly by women yet in leadership positions that demographic is not reflected, instead strategic leadership positions are largely occupied by men.

It is factually incorrect that women do not support each other, and they choose to elect men for leadership positions. It has been proven that the current political terrain is not conducive and is hostile for women as a result the atmosphere hinders upward trajectory of women particularly for critical leadership positions.

It is believed that women have lost trust in their ability to exude strength and to exercise leadership over the years, it seems they have been conditioned to believe that leadership roles are only meant for men. They themselves have taken a backseat due to society conditioning women to believe their roles are simply in the household and to raise children. However, we see with every political organisation and community organisations that women tend to be present, but representation becomes a different story.

Gender equality is a global challenge however, the focus on this article is to navigate the South African context. In an attempt to address issues of this disparity, the government has established numerous policies and innovations that sought to empower women. Fair enough, in the cabinet, parliament and constitutional court. The three governance spheres, we have seen gender quota and presence of women. It will definitely be an injustice if we do not question quality and power of the positions that women are appointed into.

We are still very far from reaching a totality of equality at all levels of society. Patriarchy still reeks its ugly head in our society. We need to develop strategies which will address such challenges from the root. Just like the many years before 1956, society must be organised to root out the toxins that

perpetuate patriarchy. Yes, women need to unite, show the selflessness, resilience and courage shown by the women of 1956. This should begin by establishing a society that sees women as human being just like men, provision of support for women organisations and football teams such as Banyana - Banyana and acknowledgement of the role of women in this new South Africa. As the late Mama Albertina Sisulu posits “ Women are the people who are going to relieve us from all this oppression and depression”. This needs a united society, united for a single goal of an equal and equitable society.