Genuine heroes don’t apply for the honours, let people surprise them

Our independence commemoration begins with celebrations of our heroes and heroines on October 26th every year. This day has been marked as Kenya Day in honour of those who fought for our independence from colonial rule led by Jomo Kenyatta, our founding President. In 2010, we renamed Kenyatta Day, Mashujaa Day and engraved it in our Constitution to celebrate not only our independence heroes/heroines but other latter-day heroes/heroines.

As a country, we really haven’t achieved a genuine consensus on the real meaning of heroism. Who should be celebrated on Mashujaa Day, and how and when they qualify. The common definition of a hero/ heroine is a person who is admired/idealised for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. S/he is a role model, an inspirational leader, who gives genuine meaning to life and hope to others.

Many honourees merit but as many do not.

For many of us, especially those born years after independence in 1963, the connection between our freedom fighters and our independence has been almost severed by the manner in which the surviving freedom fighters and their descendants have been neglected and ignored by successive governments. Instead, successive governments’ chosen brands of heroes/heroines give little meaning to heroism and do not inspire.

National Honours are awarded by the President every year. They are mainly Mashujaa and Jamhuri Days. According to the National Honours Act, a person merits the conferment of a national honour for exemplary qualities, actions, or achievements of heroism, sacrifice, bravery, or other public or charitable services.

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There should be no self-identified and canvass for national honours; this is a self-entitled self-belief that one is inherently deserving of or worthy of the privilege, which is the very antithesis of heroism and honour. Therefore, the Act should be amended to give greater meaning to national honours by establishing genuine criteria and robust procedures of anonymous public identification of national honours by establishing the established sommittees.

True and meaningful heroism is not self-determined, it is determined by others through broader public consensus, genuine admiration, pride, and honor.

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MASHUJAADAY

Why there’s no climate justice with rising debt

Mohamed Almas

Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it’s a crisis already affecting people’s lives and livelihoods, especially in countries like Kenya.

To address the climate crisis, we must tackle its intertwined issues, such as debt and austerity measures, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

The connection between social justice and climate justice, in Kenya’s situation is crucial. The detrimental effects of debt and austerity measures on Kenyans call on lawmakers to take action, advocate for lenient austerity measures or debt cancellation.

The importance of such actions in Kenya’s arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) regions cannot be gainsaid.

In Kenya and many parts of the world, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities and injustices. The poorest and most marginalised communities suffer the harshest consequences of environmental degradation, droughts, floods, and food insecurity.

The vulnerable populations often lack resources and infrastructure to adapt to climate change or recover from its impacts. Simultaneously, they face another critical challenge – debt and austerity measures.

Kenyans bear a significant burden of debt and austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions. These debts often come with harsh conditions, such as structural adjustment programmes, that undermine social services, health care, education, and employment opportunities.

Austerity measures limit public spending, leading to reduced access to essential services and a lower quality of life. Climate debt highlights the responsibility of wealthier nations, primarily in the Global North, for their historical and ongoing contributions to climate change.

These nations have emitted the lion’s share of greenhouse gases and benefited from industrialisation, while countries in the Global South, like Kenya, have suffered disproportionately. The Global South owes a debt to the Global South for the loss and damage. To address the intertwined challenges of debt, austerity and climate change, Kenyan leaders must take decisive action.

Here are two paths they can consider:

1. They can advocate for more humane austerity measures that protect social services and the well-being of their citizens. This will not only ease the burden on vulnerable communities but also enable them better adapt to climate change’s impacts.

2. They can also join the global call for debt cancellation, especially in exchange for climate action commitments from wealthier nations. Cancellation of debt would free up substantial resources that can be redirected toward climate action and supporting ASAL communities.

President William Ruto’s initiatives to raise revenue offer a promising opportunity. By channelling the funds previously allocated to debt payments into climate action, Kenya can significantly enhance its climate resilience. The Green Energy Strategy and Innovation programme, for instance, can receive much-needed funding to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy sources.

Finally, connecting social justice with climate justice is not only a moral impera but also a strategic approach to tackling the climate crisis.