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Make the future count



What if Women Ran the World?

A thought experiment for Human Rights Month and International Women's Month

By Ms Ayanda Mafuleka CA(SA), FASSET Chief Executive Officer, 22 March 2024

Imagine a world run entirely by women. What would that world look like? How would it change the way we do business, the way society functions, the way nations are governed?

It's an intriguing thought-experiment, and it's been running through my mind this week, as we celebrated the graduation of the FASSET Women's Executive Development Programme, facilitated through [Wits Business School](#) and [International Women's Forum of South Africa](#) in partnership with [Duke Corporate Education](#).

The programme equips women in finance and accounting sector with the skills, knowledge, and insight to become ethical leaders in their field. As I watched the processions of remarkable young women make their way onto the stage, I felt a surge of hope for a brighter future. A future in which women lead the way, by lifting and uplifting others as they rise.

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At the same time, March is International Women's Month, and as the spotlight shone on the role and place of women in the world, there was one statistic that cast a cloud on the prospect of a brighter tomorrow. At the current pace of progress, according to a statement by Audrey Azoulay, Director General of UNESCO, it will take another 300 years before full gender equality is achieved across the world.

None of us, not even the generations yet to come, can afford to wait that long. We must accelerate the process of building a better, more equal world. We must make space for women at the highest levels of leadership, in government, in business, and in civil society at large.

March is Human Rights Month too. And as we commemorate the millions of South Africans who laid down their lives in the cause of building a free and democratic society, let us not forget that women's rights are human rights too. Making the world a better, more equal place for women, will make the world a better, more equal place for us all. With this in mind, let us get back to our little thought experiment.

What if we were all to wake up tomorrow to discover that the global gender balance had shifted, and that overnight the world had moved from being a patriarchal society, to a society that is matriarchal by nature? To begin with, I believe that such a world would be more inclusive, more compassionate, more empathetic.

It would be a nurturing world, a world where social welfare, healthcare, and education were prioritised above warfare, expansionism, and the stockpiling of weapons.

It would be a world where cooperation was valued above confrontation, where the quest for a greater good could take precedence over the destructive forces of pride, vanity, and self-interest.

It would be a world where we could learn from each other, understand each other, and seek out the best in each other, in the knowledge that we can achieve more together and travel further together than we could ever do on our own.

It would be a world whereby instinct, in our own best interests, we take better care of the world, protecting and respecting the natural environment that cares for us and sustains us in turn.

It would be a world where we value and support small and medium businesses and foster the conditions for entrepreneurs to grow, to thrive, and to prosper, so that they can create more jobs and more opportunities for others.

It would be a world where no one would need to be reduced to hunger, reduced to poverty, reduced to a life on the forgotten margins of society, without access to food, shelter, and professional care for ailments of body, spirit, and mind.

It would be a world where we recognise in others the humanity we see in ourselves, where none of us are invisible or unheard in their struggle or their suffering.

It would be a world, above all, that works. A world where everyone would enjoy equal opportunity for learning, equal opportunity to sharpen their skills, equal reward for equal work.

Perhaps this woman-led world sounds like a dream to you. Perhaps it sounds unachievable in our lifetimes and beyond, maybe not even within the next 300 years. Perhaps you are wondering, too, why men can't equally be compassionate, why men can't equally be empathetic, why men can't equally care for others. The truth, of course, is that they can. These are not qualities that are unique to women. They are the very qualities that make us human. And that is why, now more than ever, we need to narrow the gap that makes some of us less equal in our humanness, less equal in our potential, than others.

We need to shatter the barriers that even today keep women from earning what they deserve, from rising to the positions of leadership that they deserve.

We need more women in government. We need more women at the helm of companies.

We need more women, like the bright young stars of the FASSET Women's Executive Development Programme, who can serve as role models of ethical governance and best practice in our sector and beyond.

The truth is, the world will not be a better and more equal place if it is run by one gender rather than by the other.

It will only be better and more equal on the day that full gender equality, embedded in law, becomes an everyday reality that we can safely take for granted.

Until then, let us keep on striving, let us keep on working, let us keep doing what we can and must, to prove that women and men can hold up the sky together!

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