

**“The beginning of your apathy is boring”
And is costing us a whole lot more than you care to know**

– title in inverted comas is a quote taken from TfromthV

This is a simplistic analysis of the importance of being an active citizen and how this can impact on even the most fundamental basic rights of young people in this country.

As a founder of the Elections Consulting Agency of Africa (EMCA), I am rather passionate about our democracy and its significance in the hands of the youth. I know that people are tired of reading about this or hearing about this, but it always seems to make now a few before the elections. Perhaps this time, we need to starting about it, now.

I say this because I am dismayed by the kind of voter apathy and general disregard of this constitutional right and the value it holds for this country. Voter apathy is a serious problem which must be addressed very early on, by parents, teachers and the community at large. In my opinion, we as a society cannot keep using emotional manipulation to the young people of this country in order to coerce them to cast their votes. The fact that our struggle heroes died for us to enjoy this right, no longer holds any value as young people have other struggles that affect them, they have their own demons to deal with, and simply have to time for any extra baggage such as loyalties to a democracy that seemingly has no space for them.

In my various engagements with young people through the country, they have said that the only reason, why elections organisations and political parties, suddenly have an interest in their well-being, is toward a general election, in order for political parties to garner for votes and win elections or become stronger oppositions for ruling political parties. None of these organisations care about their well-being, in terms of their development in their communities, employment opportunities and other things that concern them as the youth of this country. After all has been said and done, votes cast and results declared, they once again become the forgotten generation.

However, my argument has always been why is it necessary for all these bodies and political parties to pay special attention and efforts to convince young people to

exercise their democratic rights? Shouldn't this be like second nature to them, especially because they are the leaders of tomorrow?

Responsible and active citizenry should be a matter of making hay while the sun shines. Surely, if young people feel that their issues are not being addressed adequately, the onus should be up to them to take over the spaces

in society and ask for these matters to be addressed to their satisfaction.

There are various sectors in South Africa where young South Africans do not actively participate in the programs that affect them. For example, various high schools in my area conduct morning assemblies and announcement in Afrikaans, yet come time for election of school representatives, they shy away from the process. People who do not have an interest to address these concerns continue to lead, and the problems remain the same.

Another very prominent example is that of the area where I live, where the owners of town-houses are young affluent black South Africans, who have no interest in participating board members of trustees for the complexes body cooperate. In the end, they are faced with a situation wherein the levies and electricity bills collectors charge exorbitant prices for services rendered or you are handed a set list of service providers who do not take into account requirements of conducting business in this country, such as considerations of persons who come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, etc. But because they are not interest in politics, this system which clearly requires active participation and engagement remains unchallenged because young people do not want to be viewed as resident trouble makers and they are not interested in politics. Yes, on twitter and other social medium this has been labelled as slacktivism. In South Africa, young people are not active enough to choose the representative of their choices to represent their interests.

Perhaps another example that will drive home the importance of voting and active participatory in the country may be easily understood when one uses the issue of loss of income. It's almost as though, the understanding is that an individual's financial well-being has nothing to do with the current democratic dispensation. I've heard a number times young people saying, "I am not interested in politics, I am happy where I am, it's not my business". Tragically, without a single understanding that all it takes is one board meeting decision, to take away that financial freedom you or your family enjoys from your company through retrenchments. Closer to home, perhaps, in South Africa, over the past 2 – 3 years, over 1 million people lost their jobs due to the recession. We've already heard that there is another one looming in the horizon. How many more people will lose their jobs in the next one? Perhaps my analogy does not adequately explain how that has anything to do with being an active citizen in a vibrant democracy such as ours.

For a company to reach a decision on whether to retrench employees or alternatively reduce the number of hours people work during a recession is a decision that is taken in a board meeting, where members vote for that decision. For big cooperatives to decide whether they will fund small business ventures by young people in any country, the decision is taken at board level by vote. Often this also links to whether you are promoted or even made partner in your firm, it's all subject to a board meeting where a vote will be cast for a decision. Voting is a very strong mechanism for decision making. As a matter of fact, it is so powerful, it can be used as a trading commodity. Decisions that affect you at local council level, provincial legislature and national assembly are taken through the use of voting.

Having said that, wouldn't it be wise for young men or young women to familiarise yourself with this very important element of this democracy, this important commodity? Elections and democracy go hand in hand. Will you live your life avoiding being a participant, just because "you are not into politics". Until when will you "not be interested in politics", while you let your life pass you by with other people who actively participate continue to make decisions on your behalf.

Young Africans, Young Kings and Queens of Africa, take charge of your destiny, your decisions to participate or not to participate will be used to weight the values of your contribution in your lifetime. When your children or younger generation look at you for answers in the future, what will your response be, 'I was not interested in politics, therefore I left the decision making to other people who had no interest in the well being of our continent. That simply is not good enough!

In the end, you have young people's interests that are being advanced by members of the older generation. Not that there is anything wrong with that approach, after all, isiXhosa sitsho sithi "indlela ibuzwa kwabaphamhili". But this is truer if as the young person you are trotting on the same path with your elders instead of following way behind. In the end, you really are indeed a lost generation, in that manner.

Young men and women of our continent, take your place in the political spectrum of our continent. The Americans, the West and Asians of this world will make decisions for us if we don't assert our positions and take a stand! Become an active citizen of your country and of your continent and drive the change you want to see in it.

Africa is for Africans!!

Thank You
Ms Lulu, MD
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