

WHY FEMICIDE MARCHES MATTER

Challenging Discouragement and Advocating for Change

Imagine heading to the streets to protest high taxation and poor services by your government, and being told, “If you’re struggling to pay taxes it’s because you don’t work hard enough”, or People complaining about high taxes are just lazy; they want free handouts instead of working.”, or “If you can’t survive the taxes, maybe you shouldn’t be poor.”. Would this discourage you or would you still go and march for a cause you believe in? A cause as strong, as important and as basic as to save lives?

Protests have always been a cornerstone of democratic societies. They serve as a powerful means of amplifying voices, challenging systemic injustices and demanding accountability. While they may not always sway the opinions of everyone, their importance lies in the collective assertion of rights and in pushing for tangible change. The upcoming Femicide March on December 10th in Kenya symbolizes such efforts, yet it faces unique resistance, from dismissal of its impact to outright denial of femicide as a distinct issue.

Historically, women-led protests worldwide have achieved remarkable results. The Women’s Suffrage March (1913, USA) pushed forward the women’s right to vote. The march pushed for passage of the Susan B. Anthony amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would grant women the right to vote. Women of Liberia March Action for Peace (2003) contributed to ending the Second Liberian Civil War. The women’s continued advocacy, with clear messages to the public, led to their being considered community watchdogs, and developed the concept of “peace huts,” where women receive leadership and entrepreneurship training. These are just examples of how women’s collective actions can influence policy and challenge entrenched systems of violence, inequality and discrimination.

In Kenya, peaceful assembly and demonstration are protected under **article 37** of the COK 2010 which guarantees the right to assemble, demonstrate, picket and present petitions to public authorities. Kenya is also a signatory to the Maputo Protocol which obligates states to take measures to eliminate violence against women, including femicide, under **Article II**. Thus, femicide marches are not just symbolic; they are a direct exercise of these rights.

The irony lies in how different protests are received. During the nationwide [protests against the 2024 Finance Bill, supporters boldly asserted their right to dissent. Even if they stood alone, they would continue. They used every platform to call out those who were against the same. Civic education was conducted in respective mother tongues for those in rural areas for those who couldn’t understand English and Swahili to understand exactly what was happening and why it was important to protest. Anyone who was against the protest for any reason, was shamed. Yet, when it comes to femicide, the same energy falters. Detractors dismiss femicide marches with comments like “marches won’t help” or “men are killed too”. This just shows the discomfort that exists in the society when it comes to confronting gendered violence, the historical marginalization of women’s voices and issues affecting them as well as the minimization of GBV.

This sort of discouragement is counterproductive. It undermines the fight for justice and perpetuates societal apathy towards violence against women. Collective action loses momentum, allowing the status quo to persist.

Standing for a cause you believe in, no matter how much criticism you face, is needed for change. Femicide marches serve to raise awareness about the scale of the issue. They pressure governments to implement legal and constitutional reforms, like stricter laws on GBV and better enforcement mechanisms. South Africa's #TotalShutdown in 2018 for example, prompted the government to declare gender based violence a national crisis.

The upcoming Femicide March in Kenya is a fight for dignity and societal transformation. We must stand in solidarity, ensuring that the voices of women and girls are heard and that systemic changes follow. It may not achieve change overnight, but it is a necessary step to dismantling the systems that encourage violence against women. By marching, we affirm our constitutional rights, we align with the international commitments, and we honor the memory of victims whose lives demand justice.

Let us march, not just for those we've lost, but for a future where women and girls live free from fear.

Further reading:

- Women: Liberia's guardians of peace. The role of women in bringing and sustaining peace lauded globally. From Africa Renewal: 2018. By: Franck Kuwonu
- The Great Suffrage Parade of 1913. Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument, Pennsylvania Avenue, Women's Rights National Historical Park. By Rebecca Boggs Roberts