

# Dr Samia Suluhu Hassan: A Ripple of Hope for Women

*The views reflected in this article are those of the author.*

## **Defying the odds, redefining the limits**

In Africa, ascending to the highest offices has been a routine for men, a dream for women. When her Excellency **Dr Samia Suluhu Hassan** became the **first female President of Tanzania** in 2021, she defied the odds by paving what was once considered a rocky road to tread by women into a smooth, walkable path. This has redefined what the future looks like with women in top offices no longer seen as a fiction in the African context. When contemplating the **International Women's Day 2025, #AccelerateAction** provides a platform for President Samia's story to send ripples of hope, progress and a new dawn to what was once an unheard, rough path to the one that advances gender equality, exactly what #AccelerateAction campaign stands for.

## **The 4 R's: President Samia's Roadmap for a Remarkable Tenure.**

Stepping into her governance, President **Samia** has a leadership philosophy that reflects her vision for a brighter Tanzania. They are the 4 R's: Reconciliation, Resilience, Reforms, and Rebuild.

### **1. Reconciliation**

In efforts to reduce the political divide, President Samia has expressed her desire to see a Tanzania where its people forgive one another and unite in driving the change all citizens hope for, with the ruling party CCM and other opposition parties operating in a more open and democratic space.

### **2. Resilience**

In the wake of the tragic death of the former president Magufuli, Tanzania remained shattered by the woes of uncertainty, which if left unaddressed, the country would fall into a deep trench of regression. President Samia's Resilience shone a new, unique direction for the country to take, one that has led to the country's stability, the progress that was highlighted when she was named in an esteemed company of the top 100 most influential people in the world in 2022.

### **3. Reforms**

Improvement is a word that many Tanzanians attribute to President Samia. She acknowledges that before and during her journey to serve, imperfections would always rise. Rather than turning a blind eye to them, she is committed to correction. Under this, the farmers who constitute the majority of Tanzanians were not forgotten. They burst with joy when she bolstered the sector of Agriculture by introducing Reforms that helped them simplify payments and access the market easily from 2024.

### **4. Rebuild**

When Tanzania's economy slammed into a brick wall as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, question marks were raised as to whether a woman president could steer the country back onto the path of prosperity. Four years later, when an economic growth rate of 5.4 percent was announced, answers to those questions were provided to the people's satisfaction, and a true rebuilding that occurred during the three years has now been enough for Tanzanians to see the right direction and to label this as a remarkable achievement.

### **A President of Many Firsts**

An exceptional career full of dedication which began before ascending to the presidency in March 2021, President Samia is a president of many firsts. She was the first ever female Vice President of Tanzania from 2015 to 2021. In 2000, She was the only high ranking minister in the cabinet, the first to be treated with less consideration and ridicule before turning those setbacks into what is now regarded as "an extraordinary career". She, too, as many women in governance, faced the challenging times and proved her competence by continuing with courage and determination, carrying with her the dream of 33.6 million Tanzanian females to have a good, respected and fulfilling life in different spheres, especially in governance and public service.

Her presidency has seen an increase in the number of female ministers, with a total of 8 ministries being led by women (more than double the number when she took over). This has inspired many women and girls to envision a bright future where women's representation in high offices is no longer a far-fetched reality, but a direction to come. In a world where women still occupy minority representation, President Samia's leadership shows that it is really possible to accelerate action by incorporating more women in leadership spaces.

## **Carrying with Her the Rights of Women and Girls**

President Samia has empowered women and accelerated gender equality by

- (i) Lifting a controversial ban that prevented pregnant girls from returning to school, making it possible for young mothers to still realize their academic dreams.
- (ii) Appointing more women to high-ranking positions than any of her predecessors, where they now contribute directly to decision making at the top level, bringing that women representation to the highest level in the country.
- (iii) Supporting women's initiatives in entrepreneurship and economic integration. She has advocated for growth in economic diplomacy, under which she appointed a woman minister: Dr Stagomena Tax to the ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Integration.

## **A Tribute to Female Trailblazers Who Paved The Way in Africa**

When female trailblazers like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (the first elected female head of state in Africa) and Wangari Maathai (The first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize) were at the peak of their time, It was probably too early for President Samia to ascend to the highest offices. Yet deep down within her, these shining stars who walked before in defying the odds and challenging the norms of our society acted as an inspiration to carry on with the journey. Gender equality cannot take another century to be realised. Efforts must continue to amplify the voices of women, to challenge discriminatory norms, and bring out the best in every girl to a world that needs progress in all areas.

## **How Can Parliamentarians Accelerate Action?**

Parliamentarians have a role to promote gender equality by breaking barriers that block young girls and women through:

- (i) Increasing women's representation, for it is through more women that their voices unique to the issues society is facing are raised.
- (ii) Enforcing gender equality laws, which continue to promote a world where there is equal pay, equal opportunities and a strong coexistence.
- (iii) Advocating to fund more women's initiatives in entrepreneurship, leadership, education and all the sectors which women have a big role to play.
- (iv) Engaging men as allies to empower women, for they too are part of the society that is afflicted by the imbalance existing in our society today.

**Conclusion:** There has never been a better time for change. We are lucky to live in a world where this change is already taking shape through notable platforms like leadership spaces. President Samia Suluhu Hassan exemplifies this. But her journey is just one tiny ripple of progress in a large ocean. Nevertheless, it does not go unnoticed. **#AccelerateAction** provides a space to help the world pay attention, governments to amplify the voices of women, and institutions to see change not from a distant future, but now.

When the next generation occupies the place we now live, let them say that this was the moment that shaped a strong, equal and prosperous civilization, with women driving all the progress equally alongside men.