

Women making a difference in Leadership



Consistence, hard work, and networking key to Elachi's success

BY FAITH MUIRURI

When it comes to amassing political support, Beatrice Elachi has become a strategist who knows what to do to clinch victory.

She is no stranger to political mobilization and has previously worked behind the scenes to mount serious campaigns and deliver victory.

"I have been working with campaign teams to develop strategies and carry the campaigns to victory," explains Elachi during the interview.

Her successes are a testimony that sustained engagement in political processes pays off for women. The defining moment for her was in 2007 when she was roped in the 'Kibaki Tena' team, which helped to propel her into the political scene.

And prior to the 2013 General Elections, Elachi was involved in crafting the manifesto of The Alliance Party of Kenya, an affiliate of The National Alliance (TNA).

Her political journey dates way back in 2002 when she was actively involved in training women candidates through the National Council of Women of Kenya. As the programmes officer, they could traverse various parts of the country conducting civic education for women.

Thereafter she joined the Banana Camp during the 2005 referendum. "I was involved in spirited campaigns in support of the camp to safeguard women gains."

Elachi's outstanding contributions in political processes played a key role in shaping her nomination in the senate.

Now as the first woman to be appointed majority Chief Whip in the history of parliament, Elachi says it has been an interesting experience but she cannot judge herself.

"It's the people to gauge and vet my performance. Of course, it has had its fair share of challenges but I always work hard to perform my duties to the highest standards possible," she says.

Her mandate

Her main job entails ensuring that Senators affiliated to the Jubilee Alliance



Beatrice Elachi

are present during House business meetings particularly when there is contentious business to be transacted. This is to ensure that the party's policy agenda is passed. The mobilization and interpersonal skills she possesses have become a great asset in this regard.

She is also charged with enforcing party discipline among Senators. Elachi believes that she has used her position both as a senator and majority whip to impact positively on the lives of people.

She is credited for having successfully introduced a bill in the Senate that compels all secondary school graduates to join the National Youth Service. She said the programme seeks to give young people vocational training, instil patriotism and empower them to help safeguard the country.

"After completing high school, there is that window period of about two years as students wait for university admission. This is the time majority of youths are idle," she says.

She is happy because through that initiative, the government has tried to restructure NYS for better service delivery.

Bills sponsored

She also takes credit for spearheading the food security bill. "Before you are shown pictures of people starving in some of the remote areas of the country, a committee needs to be in place to focus on food security issues and monitor the situation so that measures can be put in place to save the situation."

Besides this Bill, she also plans to introduce another bill that will ensure orphans and other vulnerable children in charitable homes are able to acquire identity cards. She says that she has visited many homes and realised that many orphans and vulnerable children are really struggling to get their Identity Cards.

"I am trying to see whether I will be pushing for an amendment or a bill that will ensure that every child who is in a children's home gets his or her identification card in their respective counties."

In addition to this, Elachi is currently

pursuing a critical motion which urges the national government through the Ministry of foreign affairs to establish safe centres in embassies around the Middle East.

She says that the centres will help respond to the distress calls by the young women who are engaged in domestic work and any other informal jobs in countries in this region.

In her proposal, anybody who is working in the Middle East will be required to leave copies of their identification documents at the safe centre. This will ensure that anybody who wants to come back home can run to the embassy and get the appropriate treatment and support.

“You must join political parties that resonate with the voters. Do not hide yourself in small parties. If you want to win, join the right party. If you know you are popular and can win on any party, then you can go for a small party. But do not lie to yourself.”

Beatrice Elachi, Majority Chief Whip, Senate

Elachi also intends to introduce an amendment to the NCIC law to stop the infiltration of amorphous NGOs at the County level. She notes that most of these NGOs are purportedly amassing resources at the county level on the pretext that they are engaged in peace work.

"I am amending the NCIC Act to ensure that practitioners of peace are responsible in what they are doing and minimise cases where briefcase organisations say they are doing peace," she notes.

Her guns are also trained on the Defence Act which she says contravenes the Constitution. "When you look at the Act, you will realize that women in the force who get pregnant have their services terminated.

"The Constitution is very clear that you cannot discriminate on the basis of sex and I want to ensure that women are able to resume duty after maternity leave," she adds.

Her work is not without challenges. "Sometimes I walk into a function and its like I am an after-thought simply because I am a woman. Yet, I have no choice but to play my part in serving the country. But I thank God for the strength He continues to give me," she says.

"When you are the chief whip, you don't get annoyed with small issues. You laugh, learn to engage and appreciate people."

Strategies

She says that she will be vying for a parliamentary seat in Nairobi County.

"I never contested for a political seat but has always helped other people to win and will use the same strategies to win the seat I will be vying for."

She wants women to be strategic during the forthcoming General Elections.

"You must join political parties that resonate with the voters. Do not hide yourself in small parties. If you want to win, join the right party. If you know you are popular and can win on any party, then you can go for a small party. But do not lie to yourself."

For her, young women aspiring for leadership positions must also be willing to work as volunteers at the community level. "You do not need to have resources to win seats. You can volunteer at the community level as this too will help increase your visibility and endear yourself to the electorate.

Elachi is however opposed to the gender top up tag which is used to negatively by male counterparts when talking about nominated women both at the County and at the National level. She says there is need to demystify this labelling for it may cost women seats during the next elections.

She is grateful to her mentors who include President Uhuru Kenyatta, Prof Wanjiku Kabira, the late John Michuki, Millie Odhiambo, and Cecile Mbarire among others. These and other mentors will be key if more women are to win elective posts.

Kujuju's breath of freshness in Meru politics



Florence Kajuju

BY JOSEPH MUTEMBEI

While women struggle thrice or even more compared to their male counterparts to win a political position, in some counties the going gets even tougher. Winning a seat earns such a woman a place in history books.

One of these counties is Meru, where getting a woman elected to a very influential political position is one of the greatest

achievement.

This is what Florence Kajuju, the former deputy chair of the Law Society of Kenya realized. She is the second ever woman MP from the expansive Meru County in close to three decades. The county's first woman MP was Elnina Karimi who was in office in the early 1970s.

"My election was seen as a break of the long male dominance in the region. The

region was in dire need of a woman leader to at least bring the voice of the women and youth to the leadership discourse," she observes.

She notes that like other women leaders elected under the new constitutional dispensation, she rode into office under huge public expectations.

The new offices of the country's Women's Representative were seen by the general public as a new chapter in leadership. The electorate had a lot of expectations given that they had been taken through many years of male dominated politics and broken promises.

"In a way, we carried the hopes and aspirations of the society," she said. However, the reality did not match the expectations of the public.

"Reality began to sink in immediately we were sworn in. We realized that we had no kitty to give meaning to our agenda as spelt in our manifestoes. The seat was meant to take care of socio-economic welfare in the communities but without a corresponding kitty, our hope to serve society effectively was anchored on the wrong premise," she laments.

Women empowerment

"For instance, you could visit the constituents to talk about women empowerment but with no substantive kitty, it was assumed to be hot air."

As they experienced this challenge, their Members of Parliament counterparts boasted of the Constituency Development Fund. That way, they seemed more relevant and vital to the electorate whereas Kajuju and others were seen as irrelevant and only drawing from the public coffers with no clear job description.

In most cases, she reveals, this resulted in public outcry over their roles both in Parliament and public. With no kitty to draw from, much of

the work done was directly funded from her salary and fundraising.

“Finally, it dawned on us that despite the challenges, we had expectations to meet. This meant that I had to use my salary to start at least one or two projects as promised during the electioneering period. We needed to prove to our people that we had the will to tackle some of their challenges with the little resources we had.”

Despite the push and pull in the early days, she believes she has been able to achieve what she had set out to do during her campaigns.

Two of her topmost agenda was ensuring access to clean water for Meru county residents and coming up with legislation to turn the Miraa farming into a thriving economic activity in the county.

Even though the water function is currently under the county government, she has been instrumental in widening the bracket of those who have access to clean water.

Assumption

“There is an assumption that Meru County has water because it is adjacent to Mt Kenya. The truth is that many households strain to have this commodity. Still, our women spend hours walking to fetch water. This eats into the time they could have spent in economic activities that help them escape poverty.”

She says hundreds of school children usually spend hours in search of water, contributing to poor performance at school.

“If we fix the water problem, we will ensure good performance in the education sector and improved productivity in the society. It is good that the county government is channeling funds towards alleviating this suffering.”

Due to her intervention, the president has promised to commission the construction of water dams in the county. But according to her, great success has been achieved in miraa farming policy interventions.

This is despite the ban of miraa by Britain, a key market for the region's treasured income earner. Last year, Britain classified miraa as a drug, making its importation and

trade in that country illegal.

Her intention was to ensure miraa attains the status of a cash crop because it was not taken seriously by authorities. Yet the crop was earning households vital incomes which were helping send children to school.

Kajuju wanted to make it recognized in law and policies so that farmers can get advice just like farmers growing other cash crops do in various parts of the country.

Towards this end, she has been at the forefront in calling for the formation of a

“In most cases, our parties only use nominations to reward women leaders. We should ensure that there is a level-playing ground to foster true democracy and have more women running for all the elective positions,”

Florence Kajuju, Meru Women Rep

select committee on miraa farming and the passing of legislation.

She says the committee specifically sought to understand miraa farming by understanding its dynamics and potential. “It is encouraging that the level of appreciation is increasing. We now understand its economic benefits unlike in the past,” she says.

In this regard, she has managed to get miraa-specific legislation in Parliament. Indeed, a major achievement.

“We can now base our argument on farming of miraa on the Constitution. For example, we are mitigating the effects of Britain's ban through this legislation,” she says. She has also pushed for nation-to-nation deliberations geared at reviewing the British ban.

“We have roped in the president to take it up with his counterparts in Britain. We are hoping that at the end of the year the ban could have been lifted, returning our farmers

to their economic vibrancy. The essence of legislation was to regulate its cultivation and exportation.”

In addition to miraa, her other focus is on young people. She is considering dedicating 20 per cent of the funds in the Women representative kitty set aside in the 2015/2016 financial year towards nurturing talents in the young people.

“I will use the kitty to ensure the youth have a platform to discover and achieve their potential,” she says.

The other area she is addressing is the low participation of women in politics. “Our political parties must have a policy and philosophy that recognize women leadership, she says.

Reward

“In most cases, our parties only use nominations to reward women leaders. We should ensure that there is a level-playing ground to foster true democracy and have more women running for all the elective positions,” she says.

In 2017, Kajuju is optimistic that more women will run for elective positions. She condemns the cases of violence during the campaigns which discourage women from political participation.

Though she aspires for new roles in the future, for now she is contented serving as a women's representative.

“I will also go for the same position in the coming election. I still need to create more impact in my County and this position allows me to do just that,” she says.

Key achievements

1. Ensuring miraa is included in the laws of Kenya, making its cultivation, sale and consumption constitutional.
2. On way to achieving water for all in the county and getting the President's ear on this (commissioning dams).



Gladys Wanga

WANGA proves that women bring positive change to leadership

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

For Gladys Wanga, politics has never been a dirty game as many Kenyans, especially women, perceive it to be. So when she decided to plunge into the murky waters of politics on the eve of the 2013 General Elections, it was out of choice and conviction that she had something to offer the electorate.

Indeed, two year's into her first term,

she is proud to have been named as the best performing women MP in the 11th Parliament by a survey published in the Nation, early this year.

Says Wanga: "I feel I have done very well and this was shown in a recent headline news story in the Nation, where I was rated the best performing MP in the 11th Parliament. This is humbling to hear that my people think so highly of the work I am doing for them."

So when did she get interested in politics. Her interest in politics begun while at Kisumu Girls High school where she was the Head girl. This blossomed further at Kenyatta University where she successfully contested for the post of Secretary General of Kenyatta University Students Union, to make history as the first female to hold the post.

Later, she campaigned for the post of Secretary General of the National Students Union of Public Universities and was victorious.

Indeed, politics has been in her blood thanks to her father, John Ondiegi Nyasuna, who had served as a councilor and Kisumu County Council chairman, for many years. That came in handy when she decided to campaign for the coveted ODM ticket to vie for the Homa Bay County Women's Representative's seat. She won.

Since then, the tough-talking politician popularly known as Nyasuna to her supporters, has never looked back.

In the past two years, she has won many friends in her party and in the august House making her go places beyond her wildest dreams.

Former manager

Wanga, who is a former manager with a Non Governmental Organisation, is wearing many hats in the legislative arm of the national Government. She is a member of the powerful Parliamentary Service Commission, where she is the chairperson of the subcommittee on information and public communication.

This 29-member committee was created by the current Parliament to specifically demystify the august House in the eyes of the ordinary Kenyans by having an Open Day once a year and making it more accessible to the public by promoting its activities during the annual Agriculture of Kenya shows that are held in some of the 47 Counties.

She also sits in two Parliamentary committees; these are the powerful House Business Committee (HBC); and the Labour Relations Committee.

HBC, which is chaired by the Speaker of the National Assembly, has the mandate to decide on the calendar of the National Assembly and on which private member's motions and/or Bills will be debated by the 350 MPs, and in what sequence and for how long.

Says Wanga: "We are only eight women MPs who sit in the HBC out of the 29 members. We have to work twice as hard in order to be appreciated, but our presence and contribution is very useful. So far, we have been able to promote and influence women and family-related legislation. This has been a major advantage for us women MPs."

Another plus for her, she says, is sitting in the Labour Relations Committee where she joined her colleagues to successfully lobby the Budget committee members, chaired by Rev Mutava Musyimi, to allocate more funds to support the women and youth empowerment funds.

Good support

While she counts her successes, the going has not been easy for the Homa Bay County MP and her female colleagues. She cites the proposed not more than two thirds gender principle law, which is supposed to increase the number of women in politics in 2017, but is yet to receive good support from their male counterparts.

"As women County MPs and our counterparts in Parliament, we aggressively canvassed, lobbied, cajoled and even led protests until we got the support of some of our male colleagues led by the Budget committee chairman, and our Speaker, Justin Muturi," Wanga says with pride.

The Affirmative Action Act, like the Constituency Development Fund under the elected MPs, has created a special devolved fund to be used by the 47 County Women MPs to promote affirmative action programmes and activities in their respective areas. But its legality and constitutionality has been challenged in the High Court.

On other issues, the Homa Bay County MP has managed to move two motions. The first was on enhancing road safety in the country at a time when the death toll had

reached a worrying level following one of the worst road accidents in recent years which involved a bus along Nairobi-Narok road at Ntulule where over 42 people died.

The motion aims at giving the National Transport Safety Council and the Ministry of Transport and of Roads more stringent powers to deal with the causes of road accidents.

Another motion moved by Wanga is on the subsidising of training costs for oncologists studying Masters Degree to

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Gladys Wanga, Homabay County Women Rep

address the serious shortage of the experts to deal with rising cases of cancer. Because it has budgetary implications, the motion is pending before the Budget committee for consideration.

Other than the two motions, Wanga has also submitted an amendment to the Cancer Prevention Control and Management Act seeking to ensure that all Level 5 Hospitals in the 47 Counties are provided with diagnostic equipments for cancer detection, management and treatment.

Outside the august House, she wears another powerful hat of being the chairperson of ODM in the County.

"This was a major achievement for me and women in ODM because we are only two women branch chairpersons in the whole country. It was not easy; it was a big challenge to get elected. Some people did not

think a woman should be the branch boss," Wanga says.

Another challenge for her since then is to ensure that all her branch and the sub-branches in the eight constituencies and 40 wards are not only awake, but are active and operational.

She has started a mentorship programme for all the women and girls in the area. This process culminates in an annual summit attended by MCAs, County board and executive members and aspiring women leaders.

Says Wanga: "At a personal level, I have a group of girls I am empowering. Since March last year, I launched the 'Mama County Says' mentorship programme for the school girls in Homa Bay County. We meet annually at a different school in the eight constituencies and discuss different topics that relate to them like the digital world; careers and discipline, sex and relationships; their studies and radicalization among others."

Mentorship programme

The last summit was held Mirogi in Ndhwa sub-county and was attended by over 2,000 schoolgirls. The occasion was graced by Susan Mboya Kidero, who is the founder of Zawadi Africa, which has a mentorship programme and scholarship for girls who excel to study in foreign universities.

AS if all that is not too much for her to handle in her first term in Parliament, Wanga is also the brain behind the Homa Bay County Women's Savings and Cooperative Society which has 3,000 members from the eight constituencies. So far the SACCO has issued loans to the tune of Shs6.6 million.

Her role model is German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is serving her third term. Wanga admires her strength and humility in leadership. "She is so powerful, yet so humble."

On her plans for 2017 General Elections, the Homa Bay Women MP is none committal, instead opting to keep her next move private, for now. "We pray for life and good health that we will get there in one peace."

Making a difference as deputy governor



Hazel Katana Kwamboka

BY VERONICA CHEROP

The children at Injili Majaoni Baptist Church look at Hazel Katana with expectation every Sunday. They call the Mombasa County Deputy Governor ‘mother’ and they know that besides talking to them about God, she will give them something to eat. On many Sundays, she has shared lunch with them.

“They are my children and I feel really good spending time with them. My Sundays

are basically taken because I have to be with these children,” says Hazel, one of the only nine female deputy governors in Kenya’s 47 counties.

Children love her because she also able to charm her. People say she has a great sense of humour. When in Form One at Aga Khan High School in 1973, she acted in the popular play *Masaibu ya Ndugu Jeru*, something that made her mother really happy.

“That year, I was declared the best actress.

I loved acting. I was good in Kiswahili and even got a distinction,” she says.

But a moment of reckoning came when she was working with different communities through non-governmental organizations. This exposed her to the needs of the people at the grassroots. She worked in Kitui for many years and became fluent in Kikamba.

Having been married to a Luo, her knowledge of the language was also good. When she was on the campaign trail with Governor Hassan Joho before the 2013 elections, her ability to speak several languages became a major asset. The electorate warmed up to them. However, getting the deputy governor ticket was not easy.

In early 2012 while Hazel was working with the United Nations, Rwanda office, one of Joho’s close aides attended a wedding in the country and met Hazel. He told her that Joho, then an assistant minister for Planning, wanted to work with her as he contested for the governorship position.

After that meeting with the aide, things moved fast. She remembers one interview in Nairobi where she was asked what she was bringing on the table. She said her skills and ability to work with many people.

After several discussions that lasted a couple of months, Joho asked her to officially join him in the campaigns. “I told my boss that I was going into this new field and he encouraged me, assuring me that if it didn’t work, I’d always go back.”

With that assurance, she hit the ground with Joho learning quickly the political game. But it turned out not be a walk in the park as some electorate were uncomfortable with supporting someone they knew little about. But having worked in the corporate sector in public relations, she knew how to sell Brand Hazel. And when Joho announced her as the running mate, other competitors tried to influence her to join their camp. She refused and together with Joho they won.

Hazel, who has a degree in Economics and Sociology from Delhi University in India and currently studying for her masters in Strategic Management at Kenya Methodist University, says she is now applying her skills come up with policies that are impacting positively on the lives of the people of Mombasa.

She has learnt lesson that will be very useful in the 2017 general elections. Some of the lessons she learnt including

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framing of the messages in manner that they resonate with the electorate, ; ensuring you are in a very strategic party and position for one to win, and the importance of showcasing your previous development record to win the hearts of the electorate.

Hazel contends that politics is, however, a man's world and as a deputy governor she may not be as visible as the governor.

"I even checked in the Constitution and realized that unlike the governor's role which has been extensively expounded, the deputy governor's primary function is to deputize the governor."

She is happy the governor keeps her in-tray full. But the most important thing is she has used her position to transform lives in the County

"Together with the governor, we have executed many projects in the county that I am proud of. Some of them include:

Trained over 250 youths to work closely with the police to ensure security, and hence development in the county.

She introduced the Rwanda concept of 'Omuganda' where everyone participates in cleaning up of the environment.

Street lighting extended to backstreet lanes enabling small businesses to be in operation up to late at night and reduce violence against women

Revenue collection streamlined and county now collects up to Sh10 million a day

Influenced development partners to invest more in development by, among other things, building tourism and culture centre in Mombasa CBD and a public library away from the city.

She has also, through fundraising, helped to build a dormitory that will accommodate 140 girls. She is passionate about this because these girls walk for 10km every day to school, while defilers lay in wait, cutting short their dream of education. Also, when they go home in the evening they do chores instead of studying. Keeping them in school will give them a good chance at life.

Through her efforts, she managed to get Bamburi Cement to sponsor the dorm with an initial donation of Sh5 million and the Manna Ministry in the US (the mother church of Injili Baptist) gave another Sh5 million.

She says being a Deputy Governor has been a learning experience for her. She has understood herself better and became smarter in matters politics.



Naisula Lesuuda

LESUUDA: A role model for young girls and women

BY SYRIAN MBEZA

Were it not for the senate position she holds at the moment, Naisula Lesuuda would not be having the confidence she has so far gained.

Being in Parliament and debating among Kenya's elite members of society who are highly intellectual, has boosted her confidence, changing her perception and conviction about political leadership.

She says the title 'Senator' gives one clout and "people listen to you when you speak". The title has enabled her to address some of the issues in Samburu community which she could not have normally done as an ordinary person.

She can now confidently talk about female circumcision, insecurity and encourage her pastoralist community to embrace beneficial

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ways to deal with dry spells, without encountering any resistance.

Yet, the former journalist at Kenya Broadcasting Corporation says few Kenyans know exactly what being in the Senate means.

“One of the challenges we faced was the perception about nominated senators. Our positions were seen as ceremonial. For the electorate, we were just seen as honourable MPs and nothing else,” says Lesuuda.

Still, Kenyans expect them to solve all their problems. Despite the mixed perception about her role, Lesuuda says her current position has given her a platform to prove her worthy.

“My position has given me the opportunity to articulate issues which are pertinent to the people. I have been able to move motions and the Senate has placed me at the top as being part of deliberations for national policies.

This is really good given that we are emerging from an era of less women representation and political participation. The good thing is that I have been part of the women leadership influencing national social, economic and political discourse.”

One of her agendas was to ensure that pastoralist communities have access to abattoirs. For many decades, livestock has been seen as a burden for the communities especially during dry spells.

“I am happy that I was able to introduce this motion to ensure that our communities get value for their livestock irrespective of the weather. Also, given that I come from a community where female genital circumcision is still prevalent, I have been able to petition the president to activate the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Board.”

She is happy that the Board is now in law, ensuring responses to FGM are structured and impact can be measured. “This has helped us to base our anti-female circumcision crusade on a more solid foundation.”

She has also been a vocal crusader for community co-existence in the North

Rift. She says her efforts have been geared towards promoting inter-communities co-existence. The main aim has been to cut the cycle of hostilities that have existed for ages.

By promoting this unity across the community borders, people in this region are focusing on issues of development.

“My nomination gave me the power to speak against unfounded stereotypes and call for the silencing of guns in the area. We have not achieved good results but the fact that communities like Turkana, Pokot and Samburu are talking means we are registering notable success,” she says.

“My position has given me the opportunity to articulate issues which are pertinent to the people. I have been able to move motions and the Senate has placed me at the top as being part of deliberations for national policies.”

Naisula Lesuuda, Nominated Senator

Education for the girl-child is another issue she holds dear and has been promoting in her community.

“I work hard to remove all the impediments against girls’ education. First, I am a role model to them by showing that even if you are not circumcised; you can still succeed in life. There is nothing you will miss in life if you make a decision to get an education.”

She says addressing insecurity is also good for increasing retention and frequency at which children, especially girls, attend school.

“Insecurity means children failing to report to school, pregnant women not being able to access a health centre for safe delivery, men spending productive time

planning warfare and such retrogressive activities.

In addition to forums around security issues, those addressing female circumcision have helped to free more girls from the yoke of early marriages.

“The new frontier is bringing men on board in this battle. They are the custodians of our culture, meaning that we must show them how times have changed,” says the senator.

Such involvement of men to address issues of culture and how it impacts on women leadership will be very critical in ensuring that more women are elected and not nominated to political positions.

“In the last elections, women seats were seen as just favours. In fact, most of the women leaders in both houses came in as a result of the affirmative action. We now need to go beyond this principle to have more elected women leaders.

She says Kenyans should ask themselves why, even with one of the most progressive Constitution in the region, we still lag behind in gender parity in decision making positions.

“We need elected women governors, senators, MPs and MCAs in the next elections,” she says.

Lesuuda, who is also the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (Kewopa) vice-chair, considers her current office as a warm-up for another assignment.

“Before my nomination, I didn’t have any political ambitions. However, this current position is my launching pad for another position. Although I am not revealing what I will stand for, I will seek an elective position in 2017.”

Apart from participating in competitive politics, she also wants to break barriers that make young women in her community not to run for elective positions.

“I want to make girls believe that the ability to dream is within them. They must begin to see that it is possible. It will be a battle dedicated to women in my community and the country at large.”

Uasin Gishu's women rights champ gets her reward

BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

When Eusilah Ng'eny started championing women rights, many did not take her seriously. But her consistence and determination was rewarded when she was elected as the Uasin Gishu County Women Representative

As a parliamentarian, she now has the authority, the time and confidence to push her passion of championing women's rights to a higher level.

Parliament is where she loves to be most. Being a member of the Sports Committee makes her even happier as she adores sports.

Eusilah, who has in the past served as elected councillor for Hospital ward and a deputy mayor in Eldoret Municipality, has carved out her niche in the political arena.

Women's rights

"I decided to venture into politics after realizing that women's rights, especially in my community, were not upheld. I wanted to help them know their rights," says the holder of a diploma in Business Management from Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) who is currently undertaking a bachelor's degree for Business Management at Moi University.

"At least from the time I was voted in as a councillor, I have held several seminars to educate our women on their rights. But I feel there is more I need to do," she says.

As an elected councillor, she knew the murky waters of the local politics but going for the big seat to represent the whole constituency was a different ballgame. She had to fight it out with powerful and influential competitors.

"When the Constitution of Kenya was promulgated in 2010, I felt that an opportunity for me to seek an elective post had dawned. But contesting for the Women's Rep was tough and financially draining.

"My political track record helped a lot



Eusilah Ng'eny

when I campaigned in 2013. Women, who suffered a lot in the 2007/2008 post election violence, stood by me as they knew my work on peace. I think it's from this background that I was voted in."

After her win, she embarked on making a difference in her electorate's lives. One of the things she has done well and which resonate with her residents is the peace initiatives that have returned normalcy and confidence in the County.

She has worked closely with people living with disabilities to get them register groups and apply for government grants.

She says women, youth and disabled persons who have formed groups and applied for government funding have already benefited after starting income generating activities. These are some of her greatest achievements.

"Gone are the days when people with

disabilities were seen as a burden to society. We have a Constitution that protects their rights," she added.

Eusilah says she joined colleagues in parliament to campaign for a kitty to enable them deliver on their promises.

"Women county MPs return home empty handed while MPs have CDF and governors have devolved funds. We have not even received the Sh7million allocated for Women Reps for the 2014/2015 financial year."

She believes that if allocated development funds, then County Women Members of Parliament can also facilitate development projects like their counterparts.

"Although we were elected to legislate, oversee and marshal the interests of women in the August House, our presence in the respective counties was not being felt because we had no funds to initiate projects".

"We were not elected to be flower girls and that is we should be involved in the management of Uwezo Fund and other kitties."

More money

She says her and other women representatives need more money for capacity building, empowerment and mileage.

"There is nothing special being among the 47 women reps. We cover a larger geographical area yet we get Sh7m when our colleagues get Sh110m to Sh120m for smaller areas, constituencies."

Despite the initial challenges, she wants to run for the same position in the next elections so that she can push for empowerment of women.

"Two years now and I have not accomplished my mission and vision for Uasin Gishu County. I would wish to continue serving in the same capacity after the 2017 elections in order to realize my vision."



Nyokabi, the Woman rep who is transforming lives

BY SYRIAN MBEZA

When Anna Nyokabi was elected the Women's Representative of Kiambu County, her first challenge was acceptance from other elected leaders in her County. Many questioned the role she was going to play.

Although this was the same issue other women county representatives were facing, Nyokabi, a former investment banker, says this perception was a major challenge.

"It was not easy to convince Members of Parliament at the county level that my work covered the entire county. For most of them,

it was a battle for territory. It took some time for them to agree on what my role was.

There was even the confusion that I was supposed to sit at the county assembly and not at the national Parliament. It took the intervention of the national assembly speaker for us to have the title of MPs," she says.

The situation was aggravated by the fact that women representatives did not have access to the Constituency Development Fund as other Members of Parliament.

"When we toured the county and talked about development, the electorate did not

ACHIEVEMENTS AT A GLANCE

- Passion in leadership
- Ensuring school drop-out is reduced, raising education standards.
- Economically empowering women.
- Financially helping youths find useful economic engagement.

take us seriously. Which kitty were we women representatives going to draw from? Other MPs seemed more relevant because they had the yam and the knife. This for most of us was a disadvantage," she says.

But as a woman representative, she had to soldier on. She had promises to fulfill given the high expectations from the electorate that rode her into office.

Salary on the line

"Even if it meant putting my salary on the line, I was willing to do it to at least solve one

or two problems,” says Nyokabi.

Despite the county being home to the best national schools in the country, her assessment was that the education sector was in tatters. She trained her eyes on this, with the intention of changing the situation.

“Apart from the national schools that give us national fame, most of our schools were performing poorly. The school dropout rate was just too high. We had to set the ball rolling by engaging the stakeholders to appreciate the education mess in Kiambu County.”

Unbelievably, the county has never had an education office since independence. The nearest office was either in Nyeri or Nairobi.

“This is where we began our journey. We have already had the groundbreaking ceremony for the office.”

She has also addressed the challenge of school drop-outs. “One of the challenges of being near the capital city is that the allure of economic opportunities tempts learners to drop out of school. It is a mix of rural poverty and urban opportunity. With this, thousands leave school every year. I have tried to address this problem and though we can’t talk of 100 per cent retention, it is encouraging that we have covered some ground.”

Through her efforts, each school in the county has a strategic plan.

Accountability

“I am introducing accountability in education in the county. Every school must have its vision and mission so that at the end of the year, we refer to it when examination results are announced. This is how to promote responsibility for whatever our teachers and schools do.

She believes that the county has registered poor performance because nobody took responsibility for such performance.

Besides pushing for re-training of teachers, she has also initiated a reward scheme to promote teacher excellence.

In addition to education, Nyokabi’s other passion is increasing the economic productivity of women. Through her effort, several women groups are now engaged in beef farming, horticulture, chicken rearing and other value-addition ventures.

Some of the women have been trained in financial literacy and savings. “They have shown that what they want is only information and access to markets and I am ensuring that they have these two. I am in talks with experts to give them the necessary advice,” she says.

Currently, there is an agreement with Jomo Kenyatta University of Technology to train some women groups on entrepreneurship and leadership. These women groups have more than Sh8 million as circulating capital.

“I am introducing accountability in education in the county. Every school must have its vision and mission so that at the end of the year, we refer to it when examination results are announced. This is how to promote responsibility for whatever our teachers and schools do.”

Anna Nyokabi, Kiambu County
Women Rep

As result of her intervention, the uptake of the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) has also increased. And as they grow their business, she is also ensuring that women have a right to land ownership.

Disinheritance

“There are many cases of disinheritance in the county and in most cases women are the victims. We have had cases of women groups that have been short-changed through dubious land transactions. In some cases, sons have conspired to sideline their mothers from land and property. Land is a factor of production and more women should have access to it.”

She adds: “I have personally taken the battle to the Lands offices to ensure that the affected women have got their land and property back. There are other pending cases but we have had a streak of success in giving the women back their means to economic

productivity.”

With a fund expected in this financial year, there are plans to empower more youth through economic ventures.

“We have just rescued thousands of young people from the drinking problem. My next frontier is to give them a lifeline through economic opportunity so that they don’t fall into the trap again,” she says.

Forefront

In Parliament, she has been at the forefront in the passages of important legislations.

“I take pride in the fact that we have passed a law that ensures young girls have a say in marriage. We have also secured their rights. Such good legislation is what gives meaning to what our roles in the country.”

Nyokabi, who is the current Executive of the Council of African Political Parties and Vice President, East African Region, argues that political parties have a lot of ground to cover to ensure more women participate in political processes.

“We still lag behind. This is despite the fact that we were the first country in the region to introduce this important democratic tenet.

Even when the Constitution is clear in terms of schedules on gender representation, we still have a battle to fulfill what is a binding constitutional requirement. The problem is that politics is seen through the prism of men. Our parties must have women in their ranks.”

She believes that women can deliver and they have proved it. She is currently going beyond what she has done to send a message to the voters that she is the candidate they need to look for in 2017.

“For instance, I am looking for funds to establish a resource centre in Kiambu. We are also exploring the possibility of having a cancer research centre. What I value most is that this leadership opportunity enables me to have real impact in the lives of the people,” she says.

Arguing that she has a lot in her in-tray, Nyokabi believes her achievements are what will propel her in 2017 General Elections.

One woman's effort to demystify leadership in Maasai



Mary Seneta

BY SYRIAN MBEZA

For the former high school teacher, it has been a mixed bag of fortunes since she became the Women's Representative for Kajiado County.

Mary Seneta says it has been a tough balancing act in trying to meet the electorate's expectations in the past two

years.

"This is a new position in the country. Most of my voters had a lot of expectations. For instance, women looked up to me to voice their aspirations and come up with new policies that reflect their concerns," she says.

"My election and indeed that of women

representatives in the 47 counties ensured that we have women in seats of power and influence. Women and men are now looking at us to deliver," she says.

Although she has not met all their high expectations, she believes she has achieved success in some crucial areas.

She has been on the forefront fighting

illicit brews that have made both men and women in her county less productive. For her, this is one war that has to be won.

As an MP, she has been able to be part of the policy-making committees in Parliament with special focus on women. Her desire is to leave a positive mark; a mark that people will view with admiration and respect.

For many years, she says, male politicians made major social, economic and political decisions that in most cases affected women. Some of the policies were expressly designed by men but for women. Hence, they did not deliver fully, the expected results.

“My topmost agenda was to change the status quo by ensuring that women are no longer consumers of just any kind of laws and policies but that they become the originators of such decisions.

The only way to change society is by ensuring that gender inclusivity is left to rule supreme. It is encouraging that new laws and policies have been brought to the floor of both Houses by women leaders. Given that we started with nothing, the strides made so far are encouraging.”

Taking her agenda to a new level, she has been at the forefront in promoting women participation in county affairs.

Currently, all the constituency offices in her county have women coordinators. This, she says, helps to demystify leadership in the community.

Her Maasai community traditionally perceived leadership as a preserve of men. This perception has been perpetuated through political parties and community indoctrination, she says.

“The best way to break this misguided culture is to identify specific women in leadership who can help society to view women positively. When you task women with such offices, you help improve their confidence and self-belief and change mindsets,” says Seneta.

In what appears to be setting the

example, her security officer is a police woman.

“As leaders, we must be at the forefront in living the ideals that we want society to cherish and uphold. Some of the failures we experience in our national affairs are due to failure to lead by example,” she says.

The other thing she is leading by example is ensuring that girls remain in class to complete education.

“As leaders, we must be at the forefront in living the ideals that we want society to cherish and uphold. Some of the failures we experience in our national affairs are due to failure to lead by example,

Mary Seneta Kajjado County Women Rep

In this regard, she has had to address one of the root causes of school drop-outs among girls: female circumcision. She is leading a sustained anti-female circumcision campaigns in the county.

If she succeeds in getting more girls completing education, she says, more women from her community will participate in decision-making, thus improving their status.

“Education gives girls the power to break negative culture that holds them back. Education gives women the voice to speak and demand what rightfully belongs to them in the community and nation.

My campaigns are geared towards reducing the number of girls who are married early after they are circumcised. It is encouraging that we are registering good results in this regard,” she says.

Currently, she notes, there are two bursary kitties geared towards supporting girls’ education. Nearly 200 girls have also

received partial scholarships which have boosted their chances of remaining in and completing school.

Another achievement she has helped register is helping women be financially secure. More than 500 women organized in various groups, are using table banking to grow their finances. These groups, she adds, are controlling up to Sh28 million in bank savings.

“We are looking at empowering women by availing finances to them. This is how to break the male dominance in our community and give women the lifeline to grow economically.”

They are also making more money through initiatives that preserve culture and earn them income. Under the Kajjado Women Empowerment Initiative, women add value to traditional beading and fashion.

Seneta hopes that once the Women Representative kit becomes active, she is going to use the resources to further invest in areas that empower women.

She also wants women who are already empowered to come out and fight for political representation.

“Women must go out there and compete for positions of decision-making. It is not good for us to wait for direct nominations. Such nominations have been used against us in the past. Let us not be willing to settle for seats which have been set aside for us. We must claim the ones that are being touted as a preserve of male politicians.”

Seneta believes the current position she holds has sharpened her skills in political leadership, strategy and tactics, readying her for a higher office come 2017.

“For now, I am proving myself to the voters that I am able to come up with real solutions that inspire them. When that time comes, I will definitely cross the bridge and settle for a higher calling. For now, I want to fulfill all the promises I made during my campaign in 2013.”

MP transforms life in clash torn constituency



Grace Kipchoim

BY FAITH MUIRURI

“Leadership belongs to those who take it,” affirms Grace Kipchoim who is the first Endorois woman to be elected in Kenya’s Parliamentary history.

Kipchoim saw a vacuum in leadership and went for it. She says that Baringo South has for years remained a soft spot for vicious banditry and cattle rustling attacks which left scores of people dead and thousands displaced.

This informed the basis of her campaigns which were about reclaiming the constituency which was still grappling with decade long insecurity.

“Successive leadership had failed to restore peace in the area and locals were fleeing and majority living as internally displaced persons in their own constituency,” she adds during a recent interview in her Nairobi office.

She launched spirited campaigns against the rising cases of insecurity in the area in the lead up to the last General Elections and was able to endear herself to the people and become the first woman MP to be elected in the history of the Constituency.

Today Kipchoim has become a household name and apart from engaging in campaigns to end conflicts, she has been able to champion for peace through dialogue. She now sits in both the Cohesion and the Public Transport and Housing Committees.

The MP has been able to foster peace processes which have culminated in peace agreements and cessation of hostilities witnessed by both the President and the Deputy President.

She says that development cannot happen without peace and stability. “Peace has to be found and it is good that the government plans to ensure security is restored in the area.”

Achievements recorded

“I have held over 200 meetings since 2013 to bring warring factions together. We have had meetings with the leadership in affected areas of Muktani, Arabal and Marigat.”

Her efforts are gradually bearing fruit. About 18 schools have reopened after calm was restored along the borders of Baringo, Turkana and West Pokot following a peace caravan initiative that brought together politicians, church and opinion leaders from the warring communities in the North

Rift region.

She says that learning programmes were going on smoothly in Baringo South. “There is no cause for alarm over the safety of the pupils who have resumed learning in the once deserted schools. The government has also deployed adequate security officers to avert the recurrence of banditry attacks.

Further, the residents are coming back in droves as a show of confidence in the ongoing efforts to restore peace in the area.

“Over the last six months, the area has not registered any conflict,” she says adding that she has directed a significant percentage of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) towards the construction of police stations and AP camps.

“The construction of two police stations is already on course in Mkutany and Ng’elecha where people fled in fear of attacks,” she explains.

The MP has been pushing the government to create a security buffer zone to contain the banditry attacks and cattle rustling along the border.

Strategy

She is also proposing that schools and other social amenities are put up along the border to foster peace and the introduction of peace education in areas affected by conflict.

“I have approached my counterpart in Tiaty Constituency Asman Kamama and he has agreed to support my proposal. We will jointly identify schools in the buffer zone where we plan to roll out peace education,” she explains.

The MP explains that they plan to approach the government to finance the proposal. She says the initiative will help inculcate a peace culture among the young people and promote the principles of non-violence and build a peaceful multi-ethnic region.

Kipchoim says that under the programme, young people will be targeted and equipped with the right values and virtues before they exit to the larger community.

This, according to the MP is an effective way of character formation and promoting cohesion, tolerance and integration.

“We want young children to grow up knowing that a neighbour is a neighbour whether a Pokot, a Tugen or an Ichamus. If children grow knowing that this is my friend, colleague, classmate, they will appreciate them.

“Only learning institutions have the potential to influence the youth to embrace peace and discourage negative ethnicity.”

Kipchoim believes that introduction of friendly sporting activities will send a positive message of peace

To expand the network of women involved in peace work in her area, Kipchoim has been

“Successive leadership had failed to restore peace in the area and locals were fleeing and majority living as internally displaced persons in their own constituency,”

Grace Kipchoim, Baringo South Women Rep

training them on their roles in peace building and conflict prevention.

“I know women are hard hit during times of conflict. I also know they can stop conflict because they cook for the men who are involved in the attacks.”

She says that plans are underway to establish a technical training college which will cater for the youth in the constituency. “In a few years time, banditry will be a thing of the past as the youth will be busy elsewhere.”

But the biggest challenge is the low education standards and lack of facilities. Most secondary schools in the Constituency lack laboratories, libraries and do not go beyond Form Two.”

“I hope by the end of this parliamentary term, all secondary schools are equipped with the necessary facilities and have functional labs.

She prides herself for having lobbied for the establishment of the proposed Egerton University, Chemeron Campus.

“This comes as a big relief to my constituents as the University is to be built on the 1,100 acre of land in Chemeron despite resistance from some politicians,” she adds.

On girl child education, the MP plans to put up a rescue centre to serve the Ichamus and Endorois girls who are married off at an early age after undergoing FGM.

“I am currently raising funds to establish the two centres to help create a conducive learning environment for the girls. Most of these girls are married off during the December holidays after undergoing FGM.”

Her opponents have however faulted her priorities saying that she was using the issue of insecurity to channel a huge chunk of the resources to her political turf.

“They say I have concentrated resources in Mkutany. But this is the area more prone to vicious banditry attacks.”

As she shifts her attention to the 2017 politics, Kipchoim is a contented woman and politician. “My track record speaks volumes. I have done so much for the Constituency including overseeing the electrification of 80 Primary schools in the Constituency.”

She points out that the 16 women who were elected through the constituencies have established a caucus to assist each other during the campaigns.

Elective seats

“The caucus will also be encouraging other women to contest for elective seats instead of waiting for nominations,” she adds.

At the same time, Kipchoim has told women aspiring for political positions to leave their comfort zones and go for elective seats without necessarily waiting to be nominated.

“Even if you are nominated today who will nominate you tomorrow. Women must learn to compete for their political space,” she says.

She believes the strongest strategy that women can use to win an election is the power within them.

“Women have power and are very strong. The power is in our lips, our behaviour and general conduct. We are more resilient and the society has more faith in us. People believe that if we women are given a task, we will deliver. This is a great asset”

Defying all odds to win political leadership



Teresa Lokichu

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Getting into leadership position for a woman in West Pokot County is one of the most difficult feats that continue to make women shy away from competitive politics.

But there is one woman who is working hard to challenge this narrative and show that women possess brilliant leadership skills and capabilities.

"I was born in Chepararia and I also got married here, I know this area very well and I have always believed that I have what it takes to improve the lives of our people," says Teresa Lokichu.

Force to reckon with

Against great odds, Mama Teresa as she is fondly referred to, has risen to be a force to reckon with. She has fed, clothed and educated tens of homeless children, a gesture that has won hearts of many of her residents.

A shrewd businesswoman, she has rewritten history by showing that it is not how you begin that matters, but how high you set your targets. Her success in businesses is the talk of the town.

Having dropped out of Standard six and forced into marriage at the tender age, Mama Teresa had one of the most difficult times in her life.

"It was very difficult because I was widowed at an early age, and had 11 children

to look after," she explains.

"I had no education and therefore no way of finding any meaningful employment but I still believed that I could provide my children with a better start than I got," she adds.

She started running small businesses like selling seedlings, farming and building materials to fend for her family.

"Besides putting food on the table, the business gave me the necessary skills that I needed to understand people, their needs and ways in which they could be assisted," says Teresa.

As the years went by, she decided to do something that would have lasting effect on her people. "My businesses had expanded significantly and I wanted to give back to the community," says Mama Teresa.

I have over the years initiated many projects, supporting the building of schools and churches, I also have a rescue centre for girls who do not want to undergo Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)."

Hers being a pastoralist community, religion and education is key to defeating many odds. "I oversee many women networks and am always encouraging the women to enroll and keep their children in school."

But to bring about even greater change, Teresa believed that being an influential leadership position will help ensure this happens.

Not easy

Though her sights were in politics for a long time, it was not until in the run up to the 2013 general elections that she decided to vie for the Women Representative seat for West Pokot County.

It was not an easy race. All her fellow five women candidates had what it takes to win, including having a degree. She had no education to that level.

What differentiated them was the work they had done in the community. For her, the work and the manifesto were her weapons.

But there were two hurdles that she had not foreseen which threatened to paralyse her political career even before it had begun.

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Rumors begun to circulate purporting that a Woman Representative must have a certain level of education, this worried her greatly but the rumors died down. The second hurdle would prove more difficult to overcome.

The region was a strong hold for the United Republican Party (URP). Mama Teresa vying on an Orange Democratic Party (ODM), which was less popular in the region

“But I still believed I could win with ODM. This was until the party betrayed me,” she says.

On the eve of the party nominations her name was removed from the list of candidates.

Fighting on

She decided she was not going to give up, but keep fighting on. “I took a flight to Nairobi where I joined the Federal Party of Kenya, whose candidate was Cyrus Jirongo,” she recalls.

URP would take the day come elections. Her fears had come true but unknowingly, the best was to come. For the County Assembly, there was a place to nominate a politician from the Federal Party of Kenya.

“It turns out I was the only one from that party in this region, and that is how I became a nominated Member of the County Assembly,” she explains. In retrospect, her immediate action to decamp to another party paid off.

Mama Teresa says that women are discouraged very easily when confronted with very difficult political situations. Learning from previous difficulties, she has gone back to school and will be a Form Four candidate come next year.

She says she is still going for the Women Representative seat come the 2017 general elections.

“I believe I can win because the people of Chepararia see me as a role model, a woman who has defied all odds to become a shining example.”

Her story of defying all odds to be nominated a Member of the County Assembly is something that inspires her residents.



Grace Kibuku

Investing now for better political results in 2017

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Champions keep playing until they get it right. This short but powerful statement keeps Grace Kibuku going in her quest for political leadership.

During the last General Elections, Kibuku had done everything to win the Woman Representative for Nakuru County. She lost, but with her head held high. This experience helped her to take stock and work on key areas that will help her emerge victorious come 2017 general elections.

She recalls that during the 2013 General Elections, she was able to marshal a lot of support from voters across the board. “I clinched the TNA ticket during the party primaries but my joy was short lived after I was robbed the nomination certificate,” she explains during the interview with this African Woman and Child Feature Service.

Kibuku quickly jumped ship to the little known Chama Cha Mwananchi. But this did not work out. She lost to the TNA candidate during the elections marred by violence.

Attacked

She intimates that at one point, she was attacked and stripped naked during a rally that was attended by President Uhuru Kenyatta at Afraha Stadium in Nakuru.

“This experience is a constant reminder of the harsh realities that define the murky political world which women contesting for political seats have to contend with during the campaigns,” she says.

Kibuku took all this in her stride and today she is confident that she will bag the seat in the next General Elections. At the moment, she is working with the community through the Women Grassroots Empowerment and Gender Equity Society of Kenya (GRESK) which she hopes will bolster her political prospects.

Under the project, women have been engaged in income generating activities to become self reliant.

“I am encouraging women at the grassroots to come up with

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sustainable projects such as modern farming, and businesses with low interest funding for income generation and savings in sustainable investment projects," she affirms.

Through GRESK, she has helped women to not only engage with devolved structures but also access the 30 percent procurement quota.

According to Kibuku, the initiative is also designed to empower women at the grassroots level to resolve conflicts. She says that the area is prone to clashes mainly sparked by negative ethnicity and that the initiative will create a platform for the women to enhance cohesion and integration in their respective areas.

Another initiative she is involved in is the Green Deserts Bamboo for Peace and Property which encourages beneficiaries to plant the bamboo trees that offer them countless benefits.

Kibuku has been instrumental in empowering women economically, socially, politically and in all spheres in life and is credited for supporting people, mostly children affected and infected HIV/Aids and cancer.

Popularly known as Mama maji, she is renowned for spearheading an initiative that saw communities in clash prone areas benefit from the construction of 6000 litres water tanks. The water tanks today stand as a testimony of her Charity work in clash prone areas of Elburgon, Nakuru, Naivasha and Mai Mahiu.

"I am encouraging women at the grassroots to come up with sustainable projects such as modern farming, and businesses with low interest funding for income generation and savings in sustainable investment projects," s

Grace Kibuku,

Besides working with women, Kibuku is currently engaging the youth to clear the water hyacinth in Lake Naivasha. She is also using football tournaments to sell her political agenda to the youth. "The youth make a very critical component of voters because they are able to influence voting patterns," she notes.

Her love and passion for young people saw her quit college to help street children. So far, her Agape group has managed to transform the lives of over 500 children. Of this group, she has, since 2008, focused on enhancing the lives of young girls.

"I went to the war zone and rescued over 150 orphans among them young girls who were at a high risk of being raped. I offered shelter to both women and children whose homes were burnt and this infuriated the perpetrators and

my family hotel worth millions was burnt down," she reveals.

The massive humanitarian work is not the only contribution Kibuku has made to her community. Professionally; she has also done so much. She has served as the Director and chairperson of the Nakuru Water Company and Sanitation.

Ambassadors

She has also served either as chairperson or board member of various institutions such as Rift Valley Water Services Board, Rotary international, Agape peace and hope, Kenya Women Grass Roots Empowerment and gender equity, Green Desert Ambassadors of Peace and Prosperity among others.

These positions have enabled her to gain wealth of experience in management and human relations. Skills she hopes she will use to serve her people better.

She says that nothing comes on a silver platter and urges women aspirants to prepare the ground before they can seek for elective seats. "You must have a mission, vision and clear objectives. This will help you know who you are journeying with. You must also look for like minded people and identify those you can move with to the next level."

She says that with proper strategies, more women will win seats during the next General Elections. "Women aspiring for political leadership must look for platforms to sell their

Zaja shows the strength of a woman

BY FAITH MUIRURI

As a young girl she watched helplessly as persons with disability suffered from injustices directed at them by the society.

From public health facilities to police stations and learning institutions, persons with disabilities were treated with a lot of disdain.

At the public health facilities, Hamisa Zaja watched as young disabled mothers crawled through the murky and filthy wards after delivery with no attention accorded to their status. In police stations, the story bordered

to hostility and inability by the officers to communicate with those who were deaf. In schools, they had to compete equally with physically able children.

"These injustices solidified my resolve to crusade for the rights of disabled persons," adds Zaja who is also disabled. She joined the Association of Disabled Persons in Coast Province and has never looked back.

"At first my peers dismissed the move as ill advised but I remained focused towards ensuring that justice becomes an overriding factor in the society, even for the disabled," affirms Zaja who now serves as

the chairperson of the Association of Persons living with disabilities in Coast Province.

Her passion to empower the disabled persons pushed her into public limelight. During the last General Elections, she contested for the Mombasa Gubernatorial seat on a Wiper Ticket but pulled out in support of the incumbent Hassan Joho.

This move helped Zaja to remain relevant in the political scene. Today she has become a force to reckon with in Mombasa County. She is currently implementing a multi-million community project which has seen over 90

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Hamisa Zaja

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youth in Mombasa County gainfully engaged in employment.

According to Zaja, the project entails undertaking renovation of toilets previously manned by the county government.

“I managed to mobilize resources and with the support from the Swedish government, we were able to renovate 30 units at Kongowea market. The youth who were engaged in construction work were employed on permanent basis upon completion of the project.”

She says the project also roped in youth who were previously engaged in criminal activities and drug abuse. “We brought them on board and they were trained on book

keeping, hygiene, participatory planning and how to keep clear bank accounts,” she explains.

She says that the project has transformed their livelihoods and majority work as cashiers, cleaners and clerks.

“We have been able to put up formal structures where some work as cleaners, clerks, cashiers and supervisors,” she adds.

Zaja says that initially, the youth were able to generate Ksh600,000 but the revenue has gone up to an impressive Ksh1.3 million per month. This initiative has not gone unnoticed. Two months ago the group won the 2015 African Sanitation Award.

The project has been replicated in

Bangladesh and Majengo areas where an additional 60 toilets have been put up at the market places with residents being able to access clean water.

“Kakamega, Kisumu, Nyeri and Turkana counties have visited the County to learn from us how they can replicate the project in their respective areas,” she notes.

In 2014, Zaja was nominated to represent Kenya in the United States in a forum dubbed Women Leadership Peace project in recognition of her peace efforts before, during and after the 2013 General Elections. She has also won the Human Rights Activist for Persons with Disabilities awarded by Muslim for Human Rights (MUHURI) and the Best woman Achiever by Gulf African Bank in recognition of her efforts to secure bursaries for needy students who are disabled.

With support from development partners, she has set up a workshop where persons with disabilities have been equipped with skills to help uplift their livelihoods.

“The initiative not only involves helping them to identify opportunities around them but also understand and adapt to disability and to obtain social services like health care, government assistance and legal aid,” she explains.

She cites cases where women and girls living with disability are raped while the culprits go unpunished due to their inability to identify their assailants.

But to bring even greater change, Zaja eyes are on being in decision making position where she can push and influence policies that work in the interest of the disabled persons.

In this regard, she plans to contest for the Woman Representative seat. She is optimistic that she will win the seat to enable her to initiate more projects that will help transform livelihoods in the area.

Among issues she intends to address once elected include education, health, and the infrastructure, among other issues. But her fears are that majority of the disabled persons are still being marginalised by political parties and therefore hardly given opportunities to prove their abilities. The situation is even worse for disabled women.

For Materere, 2013 general elections was a leap of faith

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

If there is one person that has shaped Elizabeth Materere's view of women leadership, then it is her mother. She lost her father while in Standard one, with the burden of looking after five of them falling on her mother.

Her mother's leadership and management skills that ensured they had a somewhat comfortable life, started to influence her perception about women leadership at this very early age.

Despite the difficulties of finding school fees,



Elizabeth Materere

her mother did everything to ensure she took up her place at Bishop Gatimu Ngandu girls, when she emerged as the only girl in Thika Constituency to have been selected to join the school.

At the time, the students who made it to the prestigious girls' school were expected to score at least 34 points out of a possible 37 points.

"The wealthy people in our area approached my mother and told her that since we were poor, I should exchange my spot in the school for one in Chania girls so that their daughter could take my place," she explains.

Her mother would hear none of it, and against all odds, ensured she joined the school. From there, she made her way to the University of Nairobi to study Political Science. Her year mates were notable personalities such as Governor of Nairobi, Evans Kidero.

Being the granddaughter of a Chief, politics to her comes as a natural thing that she rarely thinks of another career. She first tried her hand for the Mayor of Thika town "but at the time, there was a lot of resistance against having an educated Mayor. So I pulled out of the race and decided to set my sights on something different."

Missing on the list

She decided to vie for the Juja Constituency parliamentary seat. In 2013, she decided to vie for the seat under the Democratic Party. But come the nomination day, her name was missing on the list. Her party had let her down. She says the nomination process was so hostile that she had to quit and scout for another party.

"Women face a lot of challenges in political parties. We still do not know how to maneuver in these parties but it is largely because we become victims of a very patriarchal political system," she explains.

Finding herself without a party, she decided that the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) would be the vehicle to take her to the August House.

"This was a very risky move because this is the President's zone who was vying on The National Alliance (TNA). I could not even put

up my posters during the day, it had to be at night because the threats were very real due to the TNA euphoria," she recalls.

One of the incidences that to date sends shivers down her spine was when her caravan was attacked, with stones being thrown at them. The incident received a lot of media attention with leaders condemning it.

"I was very lucky that day but I kept on campaigning and believing that I had what it takes," says Matere.

But things did not go as expected. Though she was brave enough to accept being fielded

"The wealthy people in our area approached my mother and told her that since we were poor, I should exchange my spot in the school for one in Chania girls so that their daughter could take my place,"

Elizabeth Matere

by a party that was very unpopular in Central Kenya, the ODM party did not stand by her.

"I would put up posters for my party leaders in Thika at my own cost, one would expect that the party leadership would have partnered with me to campaign for me and the party, but that was not to be," she laments.

She says that this is sadly the fate that meets many women in politics citing a long list of women who vied with preferred parties but did not make it due to lack of party support.

Matere says that voters are looking for women leadership, but without party support their willingness count for nothing.

She says that the fact that she vied against five other candidates -one of them a woman- and still emerged second on a party that had no fighting chance in Central Kenya shows that she has what it takes to win.

Matere says that hostile political parties, lack of resources and general party euphoria

where people vote for personalities just because they own a particular party are some of the challenges face women during electioneering time.

Despite these challenges, she has made a huge name of herself. "I am a brand, even though I am not in parliament, I am very influential," she says.

Different

Matere, who is the deputy of the Vision Women Leaders in Kiambu County, an association of women who vied but did not make it in the general elections, says that 2017 will be different.

At the moment, like a strategic politician, she is studying the political trends in her area, before deciding on the right move.

"Though we are being told that the Jubilee Alliance Party (JAP) is the party and it will be launched in March next year, who really knows? Alliances come and go so it is wise to stay abreast with the developments and make a decision at an appropriate time," she explains.

Asked why she is better than any other candidate, Matere says that she has worked in public service for many years and amassed massive management and leadership skills and experience.

Her admiration for public service dates back to the time of Councilors. She recalls that without the assistance they gave to her, she could not be where she is now.

"We would take our school fee structures to the counselors who would approve our bursaries and even when the council was yet to meet, they would write a letter to the school stating that the cheque would be posted, and it would be," she says.

She says that she misses that servant leadership and believes that she is the breath of fresh air that her constituents need.

"I also believe in inclusivity and that tribe should not be an issue, I should be able to go to parliament on ODM or TNA regardless the region I am in," she says.

Matere further observes that a day in politics is a very long time so it still might be too early to declare her preferences for 2017.

Sticking her neck out for the rights of her people



Secondina Kanini

BY JOSEPH MUTEMBEI

For Secondina Kanini, her fight for community rights has made her a darling of the locals in Meru County.

She is a nominated Member of County Assembly (MCA) who endeared herself to the residents at very young age of 26 years. As a union leader of the Meru Farmers' Co-operative Union, Secondina has been fighting for community's rights.

It is this leadership image that easily got her a nomination slot after the 2013 elections through her party, the Alliance Party of Kenya (AKP), popularly called the 'Bus'.

She is also known to be daring. She has been up in arms, taking on Meru County Governor Peter Munya over a law to create the Ward Development Fund.

Munya, who is also the Council of Governors Chairman, had vehemently opposed the MCAs' decision to allocate Sh35 million for each of the 45 wards, bringing the total to sh1.5 billion

Munya accused the MCAs of awarding themselves too much money, thus denying him development funds, but Secondina and her colleagues stuck to their guns. After much consultations, it was decided that each ward would get Sh20 million.

"In the past there has been unequal distribution of development funds to the wards. It is this inequity we didn't want to continue. Some wards were getting more funds, depending on whether the leaders were in the executive's good books," says Secondina, a member of the Finance and Appropriations Committee. She is also in the Speaker's Panel.

"I was at the forefront fighting for the Ward Development Fund. We wanted half of the county budget to go directly to the wards, and the other half left for the executive to do flagship projects," she said.

Secondina says rural communities should be allowed to decide how to use development funds.

She has been lucky to be guided and mentored by Meru Senator Kiraitu Murungi and his wife Priscilla, who, she says, have made her know that the impossible is actually possible.

Her hard work, which she learnt right at home when she was growing up in Kuiru village in Igoji West, has been a blessing. It is this hard work that was rewarded with a nomination slot.

During the 2013 elections, she campaigned vigorously for the party's candidates across the county, winning the admiration of the party stalwarts.

"Initially, I wanted to vie for woman rep position, currently held by Florence Kajuju. But I come from the same area as Senator Kiraitu, so we didn't want the senator and woman rep to come from the same area. I gave up, and campaigned for Elizabeth Kailemia of our party who contested against the eventual winner Kajuju," she says.

Despite this apparent rivalry, Kajuju said at a public rally recently that Secondina was good enough to run with her for women rep in 2017 just in case a Bill proposed by Runyenjes MP Cecily Mbarire is passed by Parliament.

"Secondina is passionate about gender equality, and is a champion for rights of women. She has worked tirelessly to empower families, and in extension, the society," Kajuju said.

But one thing that Secondina is so determined, whatever the outcome of the Bill, is to be in the next Parliament.

"If this happens, it would empower me more, as I fight for advancement of women, and the family," says Secondina.

She joined the University of Nairobi in 2008 for a Diploma in Business Administration, after which she proceeded to do a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration at the same university. She is currently pursuing her masters at the same institution.

Previously, she was the first woman to be elected to represent Upper Eastern in the Kenya Co-operative Coffee Exporters, where she was the national vice-chairman, deputizing Cooperative Bank Chairman, Stanley Muchiri.

Secondina hopes this and her other previous achievements such as a crusader of coffee farmers' rights and serving as one of the most successful treasurer of the Kigari Coffee Farmers Cooperative Society, will continue to be assets come 2017 elections.

A rising star in the Bungoma County Assembly



Violet Makhanu

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

For Violet Makhanu, the days when women took a back seat in politics is over. The Member of the Bungoma County Assembly says women must seize the window of opportunity given to them by the new Constitution and use it to their best advantage and interest.

The soft-spoken MCA says under the affirmative action clause and the two thirds gender rule, her fellow women colleagues and politicians should aim for the maximum and not the minimum threshold come the 2017 General Elections.

She is one of the 63 MCAs of in the County Assembly, with 16 nominated women.

She feels frustrated by the 45 elected MCA's who treat the nominated women like second class members.

According to Makhanu, the 2017 elections will be a turning point in the country's politics as she expects to be among the hundreds of women who will literally take the bull by the horns by vying for one of the six elective posts.

The six are the presidential, gubernatorial, Senate, County Women Member of Parliament, Member of Parliament and Member of County Assembly. Under the Constitution, all candidates must be nominated by a registered political party and/or stand as an independent candidate.

Says the Makhanu: "I plan to vie for a seat

in Webuye East constituency come 2017. I believe that the time has come for more women to go for the elective seats rather than wait to be nominated."

She believes skills gained through training and experience as a secretary and as a designer, and running her own tailoring business, will be valuable in defining her future.

Her name on the ballot paper come 2017 will be a milestone in her career having decided to venture into politics in 2010, when she was elected as the ODM Bungoma Women Democrats branch chairperson. That was followed shortly by contesting and winning the party's Women Democrats national vice chairperson's seat.

In line with the Constitution, she had her name on the party list which was used after the 2013 polls to select the number of Nominated MCAs, MPs and Senators across the County and the country as a whole.

"Being aggressive, active member of ODM, and official, worked for me as I was put on the coveted party list, helping me to be nominated," she says with pride.

Asked why she did not seek an elective post in 2013, Makhanu says it was because she had wanted to learn the ropes first by campaigning for her party colleagues in Bungoma and neighbouring Kakamega Counties.

So far, she has used her networks in her political party and at the Bungoma County Assembly well to make inroads in the male-dominated political arena at the national and at the County level.

Says the MCA with confidence: "Since I ventured into politics, one of the best lessons learnt has been the importance of networking with fellow politicians; going through a mentorship programme by National Democratic Institute (NDI) and UNWomen; and sharpening my media, public relations and leadership skills."

But despite that background, her fellow male MCAs have had a negative attitude towards her and against her nominated counterparts, especially women, whom they take for granted.

Despite those challenges, Makhanu has

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Kasyoka shows the worth of women leadership



Catherine Kasyoka

BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

Catherine Kasyoka is a woman of many convictions. One of this is that elective politics is not a reserve for men; and women should take interest as well.

It is this conviction that helped her trounce male competitors in 2013 to become the only elected woman Member of County Assembly for Machoge Bassi Ward, Kisii County.

By achieving this, she broke the gender barrier that is often powerful in Kenyan politics and which has seen very few women being elected to political positions.

Kasyoka, who hails from Ukambani, is married in Kisii and freely communicates, flawless, the local dialect. Many people find it hard to believe that she was not born and brought up in Bomachoge Chache constituency.

"I'm glad I convinced voters that I deserved the seat but I will not hesitate going for any other opportunity that crops up in 2017," says Kasyoka, her eyes glittering with confidence.

In the Kisii County Assembly, she is one of the most active debaters and easily catches the speaker's eye.

She chairs the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) and Vocational Training Committee in the house. She is also a member of the Speaker's Panel as well as representing her colleagues in the County Assemblies' Forum.

Contributions

Her frequent contributions in the assembly have borne fruits. She is proud of the County Education Bursary Bill and the Kisii County Youth Polytechnics Bill which she initiated. The two are now laws benefiting residents.

"For example, thousands of needy students now benefit from the bursary whose kitty was increased to Sh3 million per ward in 2015/2016 financial year," she says.

Kasyoka says though the assembly meets the one-third gender rule, at least 27 of the ladies are nominees. The county has 45 wards represented by men, save Machoge Bassi.

"I won because my people wanted change. Male politicians had over time let them down and they (voters) had seen my good work

when I was the larger Bomachoge CDF secretary prior to the elections,” she says. The constituency was later split to Bomachoge Chache and Bomachoge Borabu constituencies.

Kasyoka gives herself a 70 per cent score in the last two and half years she has served her ward.

“I have initiated some development projects like roads, springs and ECDE classrooms in the ward, all funded by the county government and thus creating jobs for a number of people from my area,” she says.

Even so, she believes there is so much she needs to do for her voters. But some of these things are beyond her control and hence take time to be implemented.

“My work is to represent, propose projects and oversight. Sometimes I

“I am not better than other leaders. It is the voters who decide to give you the mandate to lead them. In leadership, I have learnt that there are so many challenges and one has to be determined and selfless in serving your electorate,”

Catherine Kasyoka

propose projects which take long to be implemented by the executive due to financial constraints.”

She has also learnt useful lessons during this time. She has come to appreciate that to touch the hearts of the voter, you must be close to them, be a good listener and assist when able to.

“I am not better than other leaders. It is the voters who decide to give you the mandate to lead them. In leadership, I have learnt that there are so many challenges and one has to be determined and selfless

in serving your electorate,” she says.

Tribalism was her major bottleneck because when she dived into politics, some saw her as an ‘outsider’.

“Some thought a woman had nothing to offer in the political arena and I was financially constrained compared to my male competitors who had resources to move around and campaign.”

Kasyoka says women hardly make it in politics because of discrimination based on gender, cultural beliefs and lack of financial muscle which is the oil that runs the political game in Kenya.

“I challenge Kenyans to know that God has given women leadership capabilities and what a man can do, a woman can do even better,” she says.

She believes more women will come out and battle for various seats in the next general election after seeing the few who stuck out their necks make it. Many have also taken time to learn about the art of politics through various capacity trainings.

Capacity Building

“More needs to be done in capacity building and it is my wish that the government invests in civic education so that more women are elected as required by the constitution.”

Even so, Kasyoka is not anxious that 2017 is just around the corner; what bothers her most for now is ensuring she delivers the pre-election promises she made to the voters.

But she concerned about the attitude of the country to the two thirds gender principle. She is concerned that the government and other legislative bodies are not seriously coming up with a solid programme on how to achieve this.

“To start with, the government should support women politicians whenever they show interest. It should also go ahead and initiate development programmes in the areas where women are serving as leaders. This will encourage the electorate to be receptive to women leadership.”

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held her head high and not looked back saying like soldiers: “forwards always backwards never.”

She is a member of four committees in the County Assembly: The powerful House Business Committee (HBC), which sets the calendar of the MCAs; the tourism and natural resources committee; the environment and natural resources committee; the trade, energy and industrialisation committee; and the committee on implementation.

“In committees, we have a voice, but are still discriminated against because we are nominated MCAs especially by our male elected colleagues who are always suspicious of us and see us as a threat come the next polls,” says Makhanu.

Asked to identify her biggest achievement so far, Makhanu says it has been in serving as a member of the Implementation committee where they have unearthed a lot of graft cases in the County government.

On the way forward, Makhanu says one of the lessons learnt is that male politicians must be fought head on for the elective seats and women politicians should not give in easily to threats, name calling and intrigues.

Says the Makhanu: “Women must come out and not only be seen, but be heard in the political arena whenever national issues are being debated in the media. Women must come out in large numbers and be more aggressive if they want to be elected in the next elections. I do not plan to vie for the reserved seats for women, but will go for the elective ones against my male rivals.”

Capacity building transforms one woman's political game plan



Zulfa Hakeem

BY DUNCAN MBOYAH

Zulfa Hakeem Mohamed is a very happy woman. What started off as training for women on how to lobby and strategize for key political positions managed to land her a position in the Nairobi County Assembly.

Mohamed says that she a good example of how capacity building can transform women seeking political leadership. She credits the leadership and advocacy training she received from organizations such as African Woman and Child Features Service for her success.

"The training taught me insights in regard to lobbying skills that I went back and told my Muslim community sisters to contest seats in all positions," says Zulfa Hakeem Mohamed.

Mohamed observes that the training empowered her into knowing how to lobby, use media and how to engage with political leadership and policy makers in her work.

In the 2013 General Elections, Mohamed contested on The National Alliance (TNA) party ticket against a male candidate but lost narrowly and was subsequently nominated to the Nairobi County Assembly.

"My target now is to set pace for more Muslim women to come out and contest the political seats so that they can help change the situation in favour of the minority in the society," she says.

Mohamed says the media skills gained

has helped her to be profiled in two mainstream newspapers and get positive coverage in the media.

She says that her lobbying skills are yielding fruits as she is currently engaging the County executives to allocate more funds for County women caucus to enable them empower women.

"It is important that the training be scaled up so that other women can also have an opportunity to learn the skills and come out to help solve women problems," she says.

Her interest in politics begun when she was exposed politicians who were friends with her employer, the late Reuben Biwott, the proprietor of Atlantic Hire Purchase.

She joined Party of National Unity (PNU) in 2006 – 2007 and worked at the party secretariat where she became more eager to join competitive politics.

Come 2013, she had earned recognition amongst the residence of California area. She decided to contest for the Ward Representative seat. Although she did not get elected, she was nominated.

At the moment, she concentrating on delivering various projects designed to improve the livelihoods of women. Children and other marginalised groups.

Mohamed has been on the forefront campaigning for the implementation of the affirmative action in the composition of

County committees in the Nairobi County Assembly as well as other structures at the Ward and Constituency level.

"The election of all the 17 committee chairmen were done before nominated leaders were sworn in and they all went to men. At the moment, only one woman serves as deputy chairperson. This has to change," she adds.

One of biggest mission is to see that women, especially those from marginalised communities and the lower of the social ladder, are uplifted.

She is also working hard to ensure that the budgeted kshs 50 million that is meant for Ward Fund Development (WFD) is allocated to all County representatives to help empower the less disadvantaged people.

Mohamed started her primary school at Agha Khan primary school and before moving to Uasin Gishu secondary school for higher education. She then moved to Ngara Girls Secondary school where completed her secondary education.

After completing her training at the Institute of Advanced Technology, joined Atlantic Hire Purchase where she worked as the Personal Assistant and secretary to the Managing Director.

According to Mohammed, her role model is legislator Amina Abdalla who she says has inspired her over the years.

"She has made me believe regardless of whom I am; I can make a mark in politics or any other leadership position."

She says that the plight of young girls in California touches her given that the young girls have resorted to chewing khat and are doing everything to earn money.

At the moment, she is keenly watching the happenings in the political space, and strategizing on how she will approach the 2017 general elections. For her, being in decision position is the starting point for women to impact, in a big way, on the lives of Kenyans.

