

Leadership with a difference

Women leaders transforming lives




Esther Murugi

Esther Murugi, the trailblazer

By Robert Onsare

“As women, we must stand up for ourselves. We must stand up for each other. We must stand up for justice for all”
 This statement by Michelle Obama seems to define Esther Murugi, the first woman to capture the Nyeri Town Constituency seat.

Murugi says her journey in politics has not been easy. She lost twice before capturing the seat in 2007. Such a loss prepared her for victory. She had learnt her mistakes and knew how to go for the ‘kill’, literally.

The most important political weapon she discovered was interacting with people. Getting to their level and meeting their needs. One of her strategies to win political support was getting involved in development activities that touched on people’s lives.

To ensure she remains relevant, she raised money for development

of schools and hospitals, for school fees; and women development projects especially in health.

But her far reaching impact was felt while she was a Minister. “I am happy that when I was minister for Special Programmes, I implemented the cash transfer project for the elderly. It began as a pilot project and has spread its wings across the country. Our elderly are now feeling appreciated,” says Murugi of one of her great achievements.

Murugi, who also served as Minister for Gender and Children Affairs during the Grand Coalition government (2008-2013), played a critical role in advancing gender justice in the country.

In her constituency, she has built new schools and rehabilitated others. “Many of the schools have ceramic floors. We allocated money for secondary schools which did not have laboratories and dining halls. With these investments, we have elevated the stature of our schools to national schools during my tenure.”

Her constituency has five wards. And she has built a health centre in every ward. She has also improved the education of young people by building youth polytechnics for those who do not make it to University.

In addition to education matters, she has done so much in the agriculture sector, helping farmers to shift to technologies that are not rain-dependent.

“I have started two irrigation projects to benefit 1,000 residents at a cost of Sh400 million. One of the projects is complete and 350 people are irrigating their farms. Two-thirds of the other irrigation project is done.”

While the national government has come in to help improve the welfare of

her residents, she has also chipped in and used CDF funds to build houses for police officers to boost her people’s security. The fund also supports a number of students to study through a bursary scheme.

All these have happened because she is a doer. She classifies politicians into two categories – talkers and doers. She believes that voters need to be enlightened to distinguish between the two and make the right choice.

“Voters need to be educated to understand how much they lose at the altar of being bribed to vote for someone.”

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Esther Murugi, the first woman to capture the Nyeri Town Constituency seat.

They forfeit their right of presentation, registration and oversight. A lot of civic education is needed to salvage the situation,” she says, adding that Kenyans need to elect leaders on issues, programmes and vision.

She is confident that voters can count on her because “I don’t personalise issues during my campaigns and I understand people’s needs and I address them.”

Murugi encourages women to come out and fight for elective positions since men counterparts will not hand them to them.

While her successes are jaw-dropping, she had to confront several challenges. The need of money to launch winning campaigns, violence unleashed against women both physical and verbal by competitors have always made her political life sometimes a nightmare.

Nevertheless, they have never stood in her to succeed since her high school time. Murugi schooled at Highlands Secondary School, Eldoret, for ‘O’ and ‘A’-levels before joining the University of Nairobi (1973-1976) for a Bachelors of Arts degree in Land Economics.

She worked as a civil servant for four years before joining a private firm that dealt with development and management of real estate. In 1990, she started her company, Lustman. She is a registered member of the Institute of Surveyors of Kenya.

These positions helped her to hone her management skills. But before going into politics, she joined Soroptimist, an international volunteer organization working to improve the lives of women and girls.

Working with the organization was transformative as it enabled her mingle with other women who were making impact in leadership in areas such as economic and social development, education, environment, health, and human rights. This ignited the zeal to go for a political seat.

One of the biggest lessons she has learnt is that if you keep in touch with your voters and fulfill the pledges you made during your campaign, the chances of being re-elected are very high. The other is family support is critical for women to win their political contests.

Come 2017, she says she is going to defend her MP position and with her track record, the prospects look good.

I have what it takes to be Governor of Kisumu: Ruth Odinga



Ruth Odinga

By **OLGA AUMA**

If there is one thing that Ruth Odinga is determined to change, is the lack of female governors in Kenya. She says this time around, the country cannot accept that all the 47 governors are male.

“The Constitution stipulates the two thirds gender rule that should also apply to governors position. If not elected, a system should be established to cure this problem,” says Ruth.

She believes that serious discussions should be held to come up with modalities of getting women governors, in the event there are no female governors elected in the next general elections. Currently the highest level women have gone is deputy governors. Still, they are only nine in the country.

Odinga believes her and other women have what it takes to be governors. Her management record is impressive. She has worked in London as a development

officer, as a Managing Director of Petrol Plus company in Kenya, and at the family's business, Spectre International where she started as sales and marketing director before rising to become the firm's CEO. It is from there that she resigned to become Governor Jack Ranguma's running mate.

However things did not turn out the way she thought. Used to managing people and situations, Ruth found it quite strange that the deputy governor's position did not have a port-folio.

She is not alone. Other female deputy governors are feeling the same, with their role not clearly defined in law. Her advice is that unless the deputy governor's roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined and entrenched in the Constitution, it will remain meaningless to be a deputy governor. A position she want women to run away from since it does put them in influential decision making position.

Together with other female governors, they have petitioned the senate to clearly define their job description. “We need to have our roles defined so that we stop acting as lame ducks.”

Despite these challenges, she had managed to showcase women leadership skills. As the chair of the county's revenue enhancement team, she managed to get the county government to do physical head count of staff. PriceWaterHouseCoopers have also been brought on board to assist in performance management.

She says women governors and those in other leadership positions have to be strong and not fear demanding for good governance and democratic practices, including from the governors.

“When you point out something wrong, it does not mean you are fighting the government. All I want is that things are done in the right way” she says.

“I raise issues if the governor does things wrong. I also have issues if revenue

is collected and it cannot be felt in service delivery.”

She says she has “always been in charge of performance management and I want to see results.”

As a deputy governor she has faced serious challenges by virtue of being a woman – from both men and women.

“Being a woman in a top most position is a big challenge. There was a time I was overwhelmed by negativity and hatred. The resistance nearly made me give up as much as I feel I am a strong woman. But I kept the faith and stood my ground,” she says.

While ensuring that she leaves an impact

“I raise issues if the governor does things wrong. I also have issues if revenue is collected and it cannot be felt in service delivery.”Ruth Odinga Deputy Governor Kisumu County

as a deputy governor, she is also working hard to have more women to get into political positions. In this regard, she got funding to empower women to get into political positions. She is the current chair of Kenya Network of Women Governors (KNWG).

“I have become the hope for women in Kisumu even in terms of leadership. When we came in, women in the assembly were completely demoralized. There were wrangles and discrimination especially in the assembly.

They vigorously fought the speaker. But after the training, the women are now wiser and smarter. Things have changed for the better. We no longer see the drama.”

No easy walk for an Odinga

It has not been easy for Ruth to show that she is her own person, politically. Coming from the Odinga family, Ruth has had to fight the tag that she enjoys political preferences

because she is an Odinga.

In fact, she says, her family was against her vying for the Kisumu gubernatorial position, which she had initially set her eyes upon.

“At a family meeting, they tried to convince me to shelve my idea. I felt everyone wanted me to stop politicking,” she says.

But she went ahead to vie, not as the daughter of Jaramogi Oginga, she says, but as Ruth.

Her past life as an Odinga has however played a greater role in her championing for human rights and justice, things that endear her to the electorate. She gives example of two incidents that continue to define her life.

The first one is when she was not allowed to join Kenya High School because of her father's political stand and hence had to do her 'O' levels at Asumbi Girls, a school where she was once denied a role to play during President Daniel arap Moi's visit. After the 1982 attempted coup, she had to leave the country to complete her 'A' levels in Zimbabwe.

When she came back, she was unable to join the University of Nairobi as her father was told he had to pay for her studies yet university education was free. She had to pursue her degree in Norway.

The second incident was when she was six-years-old. One day while traveling with her father, he asked her to wave to the crowd in Ugunja but instead she took the microphone and spoke to them. She was her dad's errand girl when he was under house arrest. She sneaked in letters to him from his political friends like Odungi Randa when she was a pupil at Victorial Primary School in Kisumu.

“I learnt to be a politician and survivor at a very tender age,” says the mother of two sons and a daughter. She believes the immense skills she has and positive track record should land her the governor's seat in 2017.



Emma Mbura

Senator shows the value of transformative leadership

By Faith Muiruri

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. And for Senator Emma Mbura, this journey began way back in 2003 when she joined the civil society movement to push for good governance and social justice.

This helped to nurture her leadership qualities and catapult her to the public limelight. The legislator would soon be roped in the campaign trail by political heavy weights in the Coast region among them the late Sharif Nasir. During the 2013 General Elections, Mbura campaigned for the former Mvita MP Najib Balala who lost in his bid for the senatorial seat but was appointed as a Cabinet Secretary.

Her nomination in the senate therefore did not come as a surprise. Besides being able to garner political support for TNA (The National Alliance) party in the opposition stronghold, she was very instrumental in mobilizing the youth in Mombasa to vote during the last General Elections against a backdrop of rebellion spearheaded by Mombasa Republic Council (MRC). The latter was

campaigning for secession.

She started the women of the flag of Kenya movement which served as a platform to campaign for the peaceful coexistence among all communities of Kenya. “We organized a peace walk dubbed “Operation Kina Mama Linda Nchi which advocated for peaceful coexistence of the Coastal people and created awareness on the effects of youth radicalization in the Coast.”

The group has remained relevant to date and performs patriotic songs during national events in Mombasa and Nairobi.

Senator Mbura is a member of the Committee on Delegated Legislation. She also sits in the joint Committee on National Cohesion and Equal Opportunity and the committee on Public Administration and International Relations.

She has used these positions to articulate issues and rights of her community and beyond. This can be attested by the number of petitions she has presented before the floor of the Senate.

Petitions

Key among the petitions includes the need to protect Kenyan domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and Middle East who are subjected to a myriad of abuses by their employers.

Recently, Senator Mbura vowed to camp at the Saudi Arabia embassy until the bodies of two Kenyans who died in the country are brought back.

She has also filed a petition for the protection of Owino Uhuru village in Jomvu Constituency, a low income human settlement hosting an approximately 8,000 people in the outskirts of Mombasa City. The village has been gravely affected by poisonous lead emissions from entities conducting lead smelting in the area.

The legislator has also presented a petition that seeks to protect fishermen and residents of Budalang’i and Funyula constituencies on the shores of Lake Victoria in Bunyala and Samia sub counties.

The petition seeks to compel the Busia County government to urgently set up adequate health facilities including floating dispensaries and ambulances along the shores of Lake Victoria, to address the health challenges faced by the fishermen and other members of the local communities.

The Petitioners also want the national government to beef up security on the lake through the provision of adequate mobile police units.

But if there is one thing that has enhanced her fame is involvement in charity work at the community level. She has donated various medical equipment and materials to the

“I want people to know that education, Christianity and civilization was started in Rabai by Dr Ludwig Krapf and we have roped in the elders who will narrate our rich history.”

Senator Emma Mbura,

Coast General Hospital and over one hundred mattresses, sanitary towels, diapers and children clothes to Shimo la Tewa women prisoners.

She has also donated text books to Kinunga Primary School in Mwakirunge and MoiKadzongo Girls in Mariakani and distributed sanitary towels to various girls’ schools.

She is credited for starting the Mekatillili Foundation in honour of the late Mekatillili wa Menza who led the Mijikenda people in a rebellion against the excesses of the British Colonial Administration.

“This is a platform where I assist those who are in need,” she says adding that her priorities include uplifting the standards of education in the area. She has established a

non-formal education centre in Kilifi County with support from Delka Trust Foundation to absorb school drop outs.

For the children, the legislator has established an all race children mentorship programme which inculcates leadership qualities and the spirit of public service among those aged between five and eighteen years. “The children are encouraged to plant trees and keep neighbourhoods clean.”

Under the Mekatillili Foundation, she has launched a campaign aimed at encouraging companies to help tackle radicalization of the youth by giving them jobs. “We have also initiated forums that not only seek to address the underlying causes of radicalization but also provide legal services to those whose rights have been violated by state security agencies during crackdown on agents and sympathisers of terror networks.”

In recent times, her opponents have been using all tricks in the book to discredit her. “My opponents have been intimidating me. Others have spread unfounded propaganda and rumours about me. It is very disappointing but I will soldier on.”

Nevertheless, hers is a string of successes that she believes will work in her favour when it comes to the elections. She says women should build strong networks and popularize their candidature at the grassroots level if they have to win elections.

As she prepares to contest for the Rabai parliamentary seat in the next General Elections, her good tidings seems to have started. Recently she was installed as a Kaya elder spokeswoman, a very influential position in the community.

To kick off her interest in the seat, Mbura plans to hold a big talent exhibition this May to showcase the potential of the Constituency which she says is rich in history.

“I want people to know that education, Christianity and civilization was started in Rabai by Dr Ludwig Krapf and we have roped in the elders who will narrate our rich history.”

Age is just a number for Senator Halima



Halima Abdille Mohamud

By Joyce Chimbi

Senator Halima Abdille Mohamud is proving that every dream is valid even for a 27-year-old living in an intensely patriarchal and marginalized society.

“Nothing is too big to achieve for those who are willing to walk the extra mile. Power is taken, not given,” she says with confidence.

Having been nominated by the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) for the senate position at the tender age of 25 in 2013, the young Senator is the Vice Chairperson of the important Education Committee.

Born in 1988 in Eldas, about 110 kilometers away from Wajir County, Mohamud has had to fight every turn to reach where she is now.

“I actually wanted to run for the Women Representative seat and I was making inroads. But other thought otherwise,” she says.

“My family talked to me and said I had many years ahead of me and prevailed that I should not vie for that seat. So I did not actually vie under the promise that the party will reciprocate,” she says.

She then joined others in campaigning for ODM which garnered significant support in the County “the political leadership was pleased with my ability and in return I became nominated as a Senator,” she says.

Her placement in the education committee was a perfect thing since she had experience in education matters, having graduated from Kenyatta University in 2011, with a Bachelor of Science in Education, majoring in Biology and Chemistry.

“I an educationist by heart and training. I am very passionate about education, not only for the girl child but also for all children. I pay school fees from my own pocket for more than 25 children in secondary school,” she explains.

As a testament to her efforts to impact the education system, a Bill on education introduced by her was in the order paper to

go through its third reading in the Month of March 2016.

The University Amendment Bill 2014, as is called, has a lot in store for the education sector and it decries the lack of enough public universities in the country.

“There are 21 Counties that do not have a public university meaning that students are travelling from one part of the country to another in search of education,” she explains.

This bill is further designed to improve access to and quality of education in the country.

The Senator, who is finalizing her Master of Arts Degree in Gender and Development

“You have to bend down to get what you want and the society must be able to recognize your profile. I have been a leader since primary school where I was the head girl from standard six,”

Senator Halima Abdille Mohamud,
nominated senator

Studies at the University of Nairobi, says that education is still the key to a brighter future for girls, especially in pastoralists regions.

In addition to the Bill, the Senator has been at the forefront working with youths to improve sports in her county. So far she has managed to establish tournaments in two constituencies, and plans to cover the entire County before the end of 2017.

These tournaments are used, among other things, to enhance peace among the warring communities that most often conflict over natural resources. They have also served as opportunities to build talents and to help youths visit other Constituencies, learn from others and just like Hon Mohamud aspire for bigger things.

The Senator cautions that nothing

comes on a silver platter and women have to work hard to showcase their leadership skills.

“You have to bend down to get what you want and the society must be able to recognize your profile. I have been a leader since primary school where I was the head girl from standard six,” she explains.

At the University, she was the leader of the North Eastern Students Association. She also went back to her former school at Wajir Girls Secondary School as a volunteer teacher.

Here, she taught Biology and Chemistry as an inspiration to girls that this was not a boy’s thing, but they too can do it.

She says religion has played a great role in her life, saying that hard work, consistency, patience and endurance must be accompanied by prayer.

“I also tell women not to be afraid of trying. Every time you attempt something there can only be two outcomes, success or failure. Be prepared for either and take lessons along the way,” she advises.

She says that her age or being a woman has not really stood in her way as a Senator. The major challenge has been resources. Without a kitty funded by the Senate, she often has to dig deep into her pocket in her quest to serve her people.

But she is fast to add that lack of resources should not discourage women from going for leadership positions.

“I was only earning Ksh50, 000 when I declared that I wanted to run for Women Representative seat. Networks become my biggest resource,” she says.

As the 2017 general elections approaches, she has made up her mind what seat she will contest for.

“Come 2017, my name will be on the ballot for the Women Representative Seat and no one will say that I am too young or lack experience. Five years have given me the best experience anyone could have hoped for,” she concludes.

Korere wins big for girl child education and minorities



Sarah Korere

M By Faith Muiruri

any might take it just as one of the usual training on leadership. But for Sarah Korere one such training was a turning point in her political life.

Korere had just quit her job in the public service shortly after the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) was disbanded over the 2007 bungled General Elections.

The legislator who had worked for the ECK as the Deputy District Coordinator in Laikipia declined to take up another job as a District Officer and instead opted to join the civil society movement.

In 2009, she left the country for the US to undertake a short course on women and leadership at the University of Georgia. It was the beginning of her political journey.

"In the US, I was actively involved in mobilizing support for a female candidate who was contesting for a mayoral seat. We were able to put together strong campaign machinery that made sure our candidate registered a resounding victory," she recalls.

This, the legislator says helped to shape her worldview and she was upbeat that she could win an election. "When I came back, I was actively engaged in educating voters on the Constitution of Kenya 2010."

Her experience at the ECK came in handy and she was able to blend well with other politicians, voters and community leaders in Laikipia. The legislator also participated in development activities in the area including speaking out on conflict issues in the region.

"I became the uniting voice at the height of the clashes but this did not go well with my critics who branded me a traitor and mobilized elders to denounce and curse me."

It backfired. The campaign only served to strengthen her resolve and she begun to push for the creation of Laikipia North Constituency which according to her has helped to raise the profile of minority groups.

The Laikipia Masai did not have a political voice. For a long time, she says the community had been voiceless as the larger communities in the county domineered. "It is very unfortunate when you know that your vote does not count within your community," she says.

During the 2013 General Elections, Korere contested for the Woman Representative seat but stepped down two months before the elections in favour of The Nation Alliance party candidate.

But this was after she had managed to secure a nomination slot in the National Assembly to represent the minority in Laikipia.

In Parliament, her focus is on land issues. She is a member of the Lands

committee and is happy that some of the issues she raised on behalf of the community have found their way into the Community Land Bill and other land laws especially in relation to evictions which were previously done in an inhumane way. She also sits in the Regional Integration Committee.

She has also been supporting gender responsive legislations and has introduced a motion that seeks to compel both the government and private institutions to provide nursing mothers with facilities.

She takes credit as the founder of St Francis Girls Secondary School which has helped to transform the lives of scores

"I raise issues if the governor does things wrong. I also have issues if revenue is collected and it cannot be felt in service delivery."Ruth Odinga Deputy Governor Kisumu County

Governor Kisumu County

of Maasai girls who can now accomplish their dreams in education without the fear of being circumcised and married off at a tender age.

Up to the time of her nomination to the National Assembly, she was the chairperson of the board of governors and still continues to mentor girls in the school.

She runs a rescue centre in partnership with other NGOs. "To date we have managed to rescue 68 girls from forced marriage and FGM alongside bringing on board locals, especially elders who were a big stumbling block to the anti FGM campaign."

In addition to the girl child education, the MP has been very instrumental in uplifting education standards at the Constituency level. Most parents and teachers identify with her work.

"Over the last three years, I have been supplying sanitary towels to all schools in

Laikipia and have given 28 orphans full scholarship."

According to her, she has for the past couple of months been lobbying the county government to start small feeder schools and low cost boarding schools to help keep children from pastoralist communities in schools.

Challenges

It however has not been all rosy. As an MP, the youth, women and the community want her to support them yet she does not have sufficient resources to do so.

Like other nominated MPs, she has no control over the Constituency Development Fund and cannot therefore help those who might need bursaries or direct resources to projects that really need them.

"Some of my detractors are spreading propaganda and engaging in character assassination. They have been using the issue of insecurity in the area to push me to abandon my Parliamentary bid.

They have even send delegations to encourage her to focus on the women representative seat or if she fails, to be ready for consequences.

"Some politicians in Laikipia have hired militia gangs to threaten their political opponents. Some have warned me of dire consequences if I remain in the race."

She says that she will not succumb to any threats and cultural bias which she describes as outdated, retrogressive and counterproductive to women seeking elective positions in the community.

Korere plans to contest for the Laikipia North parliamentary seat. She is banking on her track record and her profile in the community. In the last two years, she has managed to win elders support which gives her an edge over her opponents.

"I have been meeting with the elders to seek their clearance. Recently more than 600 elders held a meeting where they endorsed my candidature," she says.


Tiya Galgalo

Profile of Isiolo women Representative (MP), TIYA GALGALO.

By Odhiambo Orlale

The Isiolo County Women Representative Tiya Galgalo, has a good reason to look back with pride at where she has come from.

For Galgalo started from a humble beginning in Isiolo County and had to struggle from the word go while helping her parents and 11 siblings with house chores and herding cattle that were source of school fees.

As the second born in the polygamous home, her dream was to make a mark not only for herself, but also for the women in the County as the first female to hold a university degree in 1991. She obtained a Bachelors degree in History and Religious Studies from Kenyatta University.

Since then, the County Women's Member of Parliament has soldiered on to success. She was employed soon after graduation as a teacher at her

former school, Garbatula Secondary School, in Isiolo County, for five months, and then transferred and promoted to deputy Principal at Isiolo Girls Secondary. Within less than a year, she became the Principal, thanks to her competence and leadership qualities.

By then, Galgalo's goal and passion was to ensure that the girl-child was not only protected, but assisted to complete their education and excel in their careers of choice.

Says the County Women MP: "I realised that there was a lot to be done because among my community, the Boranas, the outlawed FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is practiced at 10 years and by 15 years the girl is married off!"

And for the next 13 years she worked as the Principal of Isiolo Girls Secondary taking care of the 320 students until 2007.

As she pursued her career, Galgalo later enrolled for a Masters Degree in Education, Administration and Planning at the University of Nairobi. Upon graduation, she joined the United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) as the national education disaster management officer in charge of Western Kenya.

The former Principal has also served as a commissioner in three commissions namely: Interim Elections and Boundaries Commission, in charge of Eastern Kenya, the Gender Commissioner and in the Poverty Commission of Kenya. She worked with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Hargessa in Somaliland and Norwegian Aid, among others on consultancy basis.

Come 2013, her impressive CV has won her admirers. She was approached by women leaders in her County who

appealed to her to vie for the new post of County Women Representative created under the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Says Galgalo: "I did not think twice and decided to go for it on a TNA ticket. I plunged into politics and campaigned against four other rivals whom I trounced at the polls by garnering 19,200 votes."

"I was from a conservative community which has no room for women leadership and this gave me an opportunity to demystify women's leadership."

"I realised that there was a lot to be done because among my community, the Boranas, the outlawed FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is practiced at 10 years and by 15 years the girl is married off!"

Tiya Galgalo, The Isiolo County

Women Representative

Her work, contribution to the community and the campaign manifesto worked for her. The manifesto focused on three major areas: promoting the girl-child education; women's economic empowerment; and promoting the livestock economy through projects on water resources and pasture.

Since entering Parliament, she has been a member of three parliamentary committees namely the powerful 51-member Budget and Appropriation Committee; the Labour and Social Welfare committee, where she served as the vice-chairperson; and the Parliamentary Select Committee.

As the vice-chairperson of the Labour committee, the soft spoken MP has taken charge whenever her boss is absent to

chair meetings, address Parliament and answer questions raised by other MPs.

So far, Galgalo has successfully moved one motion, Disaster Risk Management, which is likely to come back to the august House as a Government-sponsored Bill.

Looking back, the Isiolo County Women's MP says her membership in the parliamentary committees plus the extra responsibility as a vice chairperson has helped her sharpen her skills as a legislator.

It has also improved her networking, lobbying, and ability to articulate issues in the august House and to the public in her County and beyond.

It has also exposed to the outside, completely changing her worldview and improving her leadership skills.

On her role as the people's representative, Galgalo says it has been a challenge because of lack of funds to help them implement their development agenda, unlike their fellow MPs elected in the constituency who use CDF kitty to effect projects.

She regrets that the Affirmative Action Act, which was to set up a Shs2 Billion kitty to assist the 47 County Women MPs play their representation role more effectively, is still pending in court.

Looking forward, the Isiolo County MP says she has her eyes on defending her sit at all costs having overcome the teething problems and made the necessary networks and got the experience on how to be an effective legislator.

Says Galgalo: "I plan to defend my seat come 2017 because I believe that in the short time I have been there I have done a lot in changing the lives of the people I represent and showing the value of women leadership."

Hard work and passion wins Nyeris community support



Regina Nyeris

By Faith Muiruri

As a teacher, she watched helplessly as scores of young girls were forced to drop out of school, subjected to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and married off to older men in line with traditional practices.

Tired of what was happening, Regina Nyeris established Chesta Girls Primary school, which today serves as a safe haven for young

girls, fleeing their homes in fear of being circumcised. Meet Nyeris the woman representative, West Pokot County. Her passion for the girl child education is what propelled her to public limelight and earned her a position in the National Assembly.

"The school gave me a platform to interact more with the community. I remember moving from one homestead to another, urging parents to take their children to school to help fight the high rates of illiteracy in the community and make them competitive."

"I managed to enlist the support of my husband who had for a long time served as a chief in the community. I would use the chief Barazas to denounce retrogressive cultural practices and push for the girl child education," she adds.

Nyeris who served as a head teacher in the school for a period of ten years, used her tenure to ensure that girls enjoyed equal opportunities in their quest for education.

Impact

"My efforts finally bore fruit and most parents began enrolling their daughters to school in large numbers," she recalls.

"I dedicated my time and resources to ensure that the girls excelled in their education. I also supported scores of needy children to complete their studies and I remember approaching well wishers and donors to support students complete their education," she reveals.

This initiative helped to build her profile in the community and subsequently earned her a resounding victory during the 2013 General Elections.

But it did not come easy. At first, she faced resistance with the community which still regards women lowly with no rights at all to speak on any matters that affect the community.

It is her track record as the first woman head teacher in the County that made the community look at her differently.

"The community elders endorsed my

candidature because I had the backing of my husband who was also campaigning for me," she recounts.

Nyeris, who is a household name in the community has cut a niche for herself in the political arena. She is a commissioner with the Parliamentary Service Commission and seats in the Committee on Labour and Social Welfare.

One of her defining contribution in parliament is the push for a National Youth Employment Authority bill which seeks to boost the hiring of youths in the public service. According to the MP, the proposed Authority will maintain a register of job seekers below the age of 35 together

"My leadership is primarily about bringing the development of the County at par with the rest of the Country," she asserts adding that she has been working towards improving the economic status of both the women and the youth using innovative approaches."

Regina Nyeris, woman representative, West Pokot County

with their qualifications. The proposed law will compel hiring authorities like the Public Service Commission to first refer to the database before advertising for jobs through the Press.

Initiatives

At the County level, the legislator has been holding regular meetings with women to empower them to start small projects that can uplift their living standards.

She says that women and youth in the area are disadvantaged and are generally less financially endowed. "Women for instance do not own any property including land and

thus can hardly participate effectively in development matters."

One the biggest drawback for these women and young people is low literacy levels. Majority of the women and young people in West Pokot County drop out of school at the Primary level.

Education therefore, has become one of her key focus areas in uplifting the lives of the communities in West Pokot.

The other is agribusiness. At the moment, she is working closely with the Lutheran Church to establish a fruit processing plant to ensure that farmers reap highly from their produce.

This intervention is meant to help reduce the high poverty levels in a County that boasts of having huge natural resources that remain untapped. The high poverty levels, she notes, can be attributed to non-transformative leadership.

"My leadership is primarily about bringing the development of the County at par with the rest of the Country," she asserts adding that she has been working towards improving the economic status of both the women and the youth using innovative approaches."

The MP has also been working with well wishers to support the health sector. She recently managed to get volunteer doctors working for Help a Child Face Tomorrow (HCFT) to visit West Pokot and operate about 50 children with cleft palate.

She is also credited for spearheading peace initiatives in the county and has been working closely with the warring communities, churches, Non Governmental Organizations to ensure that the area finds a lasting solution to the problem.

With great aspirations for the 2017 election, the legislator is unwavering in her effort to complete projects that she has started in West Pokot County.

She owes a lot to organisations such as KEWOPA and Women Regional Assembly that fully prepared her for her new life in Parliament. And as she prepares for the 2017 general elections, with great expectations, she has message for fellow women aspirants. "Don't let your male counterparts underrate you."



Jnet Marania Teiyaa

For Teiyaa, disability is not inability

By Joyce Chimbi

Hon Janet Marania Teiyaa's physical disability has done little to dampen her spirits or even her passion for politics.

Her early brush with polio left her to use crutches to support herself to get around. But she says that the limitation ends there "my only challenge in life is that I cannot move as easily as other people do, but am intelligent, hardworking and ambitious just like anybody else," she says.

In the run up to the 2013 general elections Hon Teiyaa was aiming

for the Women Representative Seat, Kajiado County.

A series of consultations with her family and close allies however arrived at the conclusion that it would be more strategic to go for a nomination, gain significant experience before plunging into competitive politics.

At 31 years old, she is not only among the youngest Members of the National Assembly nominated on the disability seat by The National Alliance Party but also one of the few women who have made it this far from Kajiado County.

"I actually got in through the gender card. Three names were forwarded of people with disability, I was the only woman," she explains.

Having been born in a pastoralist community, she explains the many challenges she faced growing up with disability. "My community is particularly notorious when it comes to embracing children with one disability or other."

She says though polio affected her legs, it did not dampen her zeal to make a difference in the society. Her main contribution to society has been changing perception about people with disability, particularly women, showing the significant role they play in governance and development processes when given a chance.

"Education, working with people living with disability and supporting projects that improve people's livelihoods have been my main focus," she says.

"I do a lot of community awareness including door to door just to show families that disability is not inability," she adds.

One of her petty subjects is advocating for a conducive education, legal environment, and infrastructure for the disabled. "I am working tirelessly to fight stigma and to push for legislation to address infrastructure because it is not friendly to people like me," she says.

"Many children with disability have been given access to quality education, have the right papers but are unable to access opportunities because they cannot move around with ease," she moans.

"Many children with disability have been given access to quality education, have the right papers but are unable to access opportunities because they cannot move around with ease,"

Hon Janet Marania Teiyaa,
nominated MP Kajiado County

She notes that "while we have very friendly legislation already in place even as we are pushed for others, what is in existence should be implemented," she expounds.

The Constitution is clear that the State shall ensure the progressive implementation of the principle that at least five percent of the members of the public in elective and appointive bodies are persons with disabilities. She says has been campaigning to get political parties and other bodies to implement this.

"We are seeing impressive party support but there is always room for improvement, am personally grateful of the support that I get from TNA," she adds.

In addition, she points out that Kenya is one of the few countries in Africa with a Disability Act in place, which clearly enumerates the rights of the disabled including the right to rehabilitation in order for them to achieve equalization of opportunities.

But she decries the lack of statistics in regard to people with disability "if we do not have figures to show us how many people are affected, it is very difficult to push for a meaningful budget."

"This has been a major challenge in my work but we are working on it and I believe that we will be able to map out people living with disability to ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to assist them," she observes.

But just because she has a positive outlook towards life does not mean that the journey has been smooth. Hon Teiyaa's life has been difficult but she has drawn into her experiences to empower others.

"Even using my own little resources to do best I can. In fact resource is the biggest limitation that am facing right now since I do not have a kitty from which to draw from," she expounds.

Despite these challenges, Teiyaa has declared that she is going to contest for the Women Representative Seat come 2017 to further indicate the role and contribution of people with disability.



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