

KENYAN WOMAN



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Will the Equality Commission live to its name?

Women are watching the space as Winnie Lichuma takes office

...By Jane Godia

Speaking during a cocktail hosted on her behalf by IPAS Africa, Winnie Lichuma, chairperson of the National Gender and Equality Commission noted that the six years of her tenure could be very long or very short. This is because of the task that this new body will seek to fulfil during this time especially now that the country is trying to engage with its new constitution.

Lichuma who was appointed chairperson realises that it will not be easy unless she gets support from all concerned Kenyans. "The mandate of the National Gender and Equality Commission is huge and I will be calling on Kenyans for consultation on how to write a proper strategy," says Lichuma. "I will endeavour to work with men and women, boys and girls using human rights based ap-

proaches to end discrimination."

Lichuma acknowledges that her six year mandate could be long or short because of the task ahead of her. "My mandate is six years and this can be long or short depending on how I work. Let us work together. I am giving an assurance that I will deliver on my mandate."

Task

However, even before she settles on her seat, Lichuma is already facing as huge task of ensuring that the affirmative action entrenched in the constitution works for the benefit of women who have faced cultural and political discrimination. The country is headed for general elections and must see to it that not more than two thirds of one gender are not elected to all political seats. This means the Commission will have to work and negotiate with political parties and veteran politicians to stop discrimi-



Women leaders at a conference to look into their rights in the new constitution. The women are now looking up to Lichuma to ensure that the gains made in the new constitution are not watered down.

nation during nominations and that women win in some constituencies. By the look of things, the 47 governors may end up being an all-male affair because all those who have indicated interest in the positions are men except Wavinya Ndeti who would like to vie for Machakos County.

Mandate

"The National Gender and Equality Commission is the vehicle that has been constituted within the constitution to redress gender inequality and promote women's empowerment. This is a milestone against the background that the Commission has a broader mandate, higher budget, well financed and better resources," says

Faith Kasiva, a women's rights advocate and Director Africa Gender and Media Initiative (GEM).

"It is a challenge to the women across the country to engage with the Commission and channel the issues of the challenges they are facing on gender inequality," reiterates Kasiva. She advises: "Women need to own the Commission because it is our commission."

Benefits

According to Kasiva, the Commission needs to go out and engage with practical issues that affect the woman at the household level. While



engaging in policy, the Commission needs to see how women are going to benefit from it at the grassroots level.

"We hope the Commission will place gender issues in national debate and make gender equality and women's empowerment everybody's business," observes Kasiva.

Continued on page 4

EDITORIAL

These are surely interesting times for Kenyan politicians, women and the public in particular.

Political parties are mushrooming up every other day like weeds and they seem not to lack officials and supporters to join in the carnival at their respective launch.

But the faces of high profile women are still missing from the campaign trail of most of the heavyweights in the presidential race.

The Political Parties Act has trimmed from 160 parties to below 50, at the end of the mandatory registration deadline on April 30, 2012.

The pro women Act provides for registration, regulation, and funding of political parties and for matters incidental thereto and connected therewith.

But the Act is clear about what the registrar of political parties will not

entertain, Section 14 (1), states that the Registrar of Political Parties shall not register a political party which – is founded on an ethnic, age, tribal, racial, gender, regional, linguistic, corporatists, professional or religious basis which seeks to engage in propaganda based on any of these matters; (b) uses words, slogans, emblems or symbols which could arouse ethnic, age, tribal, racial, gender, regional, linguistic, corporatists, professional or religious divisions."

Thanks to the stringent rules and liberalization in the political arena, more women politicians have come out and registered their respective parties, while a handful are standing tall as their party leaders.

So far, the following parties are being led by women of substance who have made a name for themselves in their own right in and outside the august House in the past decade.

They are Narc Kenya's Martha Karua, a former powerful Minister for Constitutional Affairs, Water minister, Charity Ngilu's Narc, who was the first credible woman presidential candidate in 1997, Youth and Sports Assistant, Wavinya Ndeti's Chama Cha Uzalendo and former Assistant minister Dr Julia Ojiambo's Labour Party of Kenya.

Other than having the highest number of women led political parties so far, a former preserve of their male rivals, two women are already campaigning to occupy the most powerful office on the land.

The two are Gichugu MP, Martha Karua, and youthful Kingwa Kamenchu, 28, alumni of the University of Nairobi, who is yet to announce her party of choice after making the landmark announcement a year ago.

The country had faced the highest number of registered political parties

on the eve of the controversial 2007 General Elections, which left Kenyans split like never before and wounded as over 1,000 men, women and children were killed and over 600,000 were displaced, maimed, raped and left traumatized for life.

The 160 of so-called "briefcase parties" translates to about three for each Kenyan ethnic community including the El Molo!

But now there is hope for women leaders who would like to seek elective posts in any of the six posts created by the new Constitution. They are the women's representative in each of the 47 counties in addition to the competitive ward representatives; mayoral (where applicable), parliamentary, governorship, senate and presidency.

Women leaders are watching with baited breath the long awaited ruling on a case filed by several civil society groups seeking to have the High Court

interpret affirmative action clause in the new Constitution as far as the a third of either gender clause is concerned on the composition of the next Parliament.

Indeed, a cross section of women leaders have vowed to defend the Constitution to the hilt saying that they will not tolerate anyone trying to frustrate the gains they had made at the Bomas constitutional conference, as captured in the new Constitution, that will be two years in the next few months time. There is no turning back, is their clarion call as they face the next polls.

As the late Tetu MP, Prof Wangari Maathai, who served as Environment Assistant minister, and Nobel Laureate, summed it up so well saying: "African women in general need to know that it's OK for them to be the way they are - to see the way they are as a strength, and to be liberated from fear and from silence."

Act opens up more opportunities

...By Carolyn Oyugi

Kenyan women stand better chances to join political parties than ever before.

The women have received a boost from the Political Parties' Act 2011 which among other requirements directs that political parties must uphold gender balance.

The Act that was assented on August 27th 2011 and became operational in November the same year has clearly indicated that no party shall be registered if it does not meet this condition.

Though gender does not only refer to women, historically the women of Kenya have been sidelined when it comes to politics.

According to Dinah Awuor, Vice chairperson of Safina Party, politics has for a long time been the main tool for economic empowerment.

Empowerment

She notes that if more women are involved in politics, then they will not only resolve problems surrounding them but they will also be empowered economically.

These sentiments are supported by Mary Wambui, Executive Director Women Political Alliance-Kenya, who noted that society has been using different techniques and ideologies to deny women a chance to be involved in politics.

"It is very unfortunate that the only way to be involved in politics in Kenya is through political parties," she said.

Wambui further explained that women in Kenya and many other countries have been oppressed through retrogressive cultural practices.

She pointed out that some cultures do not allow women to talk in public forums and in important meetings.

Her other concern is the religious practices that do not allow women to mingle with men.

"How do you expect women to be involved in leadership if you do not give them the chance to try?" posed Wambui.

However, Paul Muite, leader of Safina Party noted that as a party they have been involved with women even before the Act was enacted. He gave examples of powerful leaders like Supreme Court Judge Njoki Ndung'u and Njeri Kabeberi.

"Safina was the first party to nominate a disabled woman for a parliamentary seat. This was at the time when no party willingly accepted a woman leader leave alone a disabled one," Muite explained.

Addressing women aspiring for various political leadership positions at the Bomas of Kenya, Njeri Kabeberi dared Kenyans to give women a chance.

"You cannot say that women are bad leaders by giving bad examples of a few of them," noted Kabeberi.

She reiterated that women are usually harshly judged when they make a mistake while men have been committing a chain of offences.

"It is imperative that we all support the gender rule as enshrined in the constitution because there is likely to be a gender shift in representation in the near future when more women clinch political seats"



Water Minister Charity Ngilu who is the chairperson of the National Party of Kenya (NPK) submits registration documents to Registrar of Political Parties Lucy Ndung'u in a bid to comply with the Political Parties Act. Below: Lucy Ndung'u. Pictures: KenyanWoman Correspondent

However, women now have recourse in the Act and party leaders can no longer decide whether or not to include women because failure to comply will mean a violation of the law.

The Act requires that not more than two-thirds of the governing body is of the same gender.

However, according Wambui this clause may not apply to women in the future and instead will be very useful to men.

Section 27 of the Act provides the right of access to information held by the Commission. The Act requires the commission to publish and publicise all important information within its mandate affecting the nation.

According to Lucy Ndung'u, Registrar of Political Parties, Kenyans should take time and go through the records to expose any errors.

"Men should swallow the bitter pill and involve women in the politics for their parties to be registered since they failed to do it willingly," noted Ndung'u.



Commonwealth women MPs root for increased representation

...By Faith Muiruri

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) from the East African region plan to push for the inclusion of more women in the political arena and in decision making positions.

The legislators who were attending a meeting in Nairobi said women representation in the Eastern African region remain sparingly low with little or no attempts to increase their numbers.

They cited Kenya where the number of women in parliament stand at a mere nine percent despite the fact that the country is a signatory of the Beijing Platform of Action that stipulates that women must account for not less than 30 percent in decision making bodies.

Led by the African region CWP Chairperson and Speaker of Uganda's parliament Rt. Hon Rebecca Kadaga, the MPs said Kenya requires an immediate strategy to raise the number of women in parliament as the country heads for elections.

The MPs also resolved to push governments to conform to other internationally recognised conventions among them

the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The MPs vowed to lobby for amendments of laws that continue to derail the realisation of gender parity at all levels in their respective countries.

"We will lobby for Constitutional amendments, other laws and standing orders to help realise gender parity in elective and appointive positions," read the resolutions in part.

This they said will enable countries to attain at least one third of gender representation either through amendments or change of policies of political parties," added the chairperson.

The women parliamentarians at the same time urged governments in the region to nurture and cultivate the culture of constitutionalism and the rule of law which should respect the rights of women as an integral part of human rights.

"We urge Governments and their agents, political parties, CSOs and the media to sensitise the public through continuous civic education on the need to change their attitudes towards female candidates vying for political positions, female leadership and participation at all levels.

They called for the review of education curricular both for Primary and Secondary schools to sensitise learners on the importance of women leadership and participation in the society for sustainable development.

The legislators at the same time said that CWP will consistently advocate for national integrative leadership platform which is free from any form of discrimination.

They also said that CWP will develop a media strategy to raise the number, visibility and effectiveness of women leadership in legislatures to influence legislations and policies.

The MPs called on governments to sign and ratify the African Charter on democracy, elections and governance so



Rebecca A. Kadaga Chairperson Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Africa Region, Princess Christine Alaaga from Nigeria and, Vice Chair for Africa Region are joined by Lina Chebi Kilimo Chairperson KEWOPA. They were at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians meeting held in Nairobi recently. Picture: Henry Owino

that the provisions in support of women's increased representation and participation in leadership and positions to decision making become applicable in the national context.

They agreed to develop guidelines suitable for lobbying in respective countries, to help spearhead the women agenda with a view to raising the number of women representation in legislatures, mobilize finances and identify capacity training programmes within the next one year

Marakwet East MP Lina Je-

bii who is also the chairperson of Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association (KEWOPA) said that the association was currently engaged in talks with leaders of political parties to create room for women participation ahead of the General Elections.

She said that political parties must commit themselves to campaigning for women aspirants vying for various political seats to help meet the two thirds threshold outlined in the constitution.

She said that political parties must now comply with Political Parties Act which stipulates that membership must reflect regional and ethnic diversity, gender balance and representation of minorities and marginalized groups.

Currently, only Rwanda has

the highest women representation in the region at 56 percent while Uganda has 34 percent.

Bwiza Sekamana Connie an MP from Rwanda said the progress realised in terms of women representation in the country has not come overnight.

"It was through a process that culminated in the adoption of policies that propagated inclusion of both gender in leadership positions and elimination of discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnicity or education," she explained during the meeting adding that in Rwanda all citizens have equal opportunities and women are guaranteed representation from the village level to the national level.

She called for tolerance as Kenya heads for elections to avert ugly scenes witnessed during the 2007 General Elections.

"We will lobby for Constitutional amendments, existing laws and standing orders to help realize gender parity in elective and appointive positions."

Eunice Marima

Resilient girl eyes Narok county Women Representative seat

...By Kabia Matega

When a young Maasai girl defies her parents to pursue her interests, she becomes a subject of stigma and is cursed by the community.

However, the curses directed at Eunice Marima appear not to have held sway on her life. She has braved many odds to emerge victorious and is today highly regarded for having initiated numerous projects in the community that once considered her an outcast.

With the journey to pursuing what she thinks is good for her, Marima is today aspiring for the Narok County women's representative seat.

To reach where she is today has not been an easy journey. Marima went to school at a time when girls her age were considered a symbol of wealth and married off early to old suitors against their will.

Defiant

She rejected all her father's suitors and finally settled on the man who was to be first Narok North Member of Parliament Moses Marima as her choice in marriage. However, this was only after completing school.

Born in 1952 at Enbogaboli Village along the boundary of Kenya and Tanzania in Kajiado District, Marima recalls the hardships she had to endure as a typical village Maasai girl.

As a young girl, she would herd the family livestock with no prospects of ever going to school. However, luck came calling when the colonial government forced her parents to enrol her in school.

"My mother was moved from our native Enbogaboli village in Namanga area to Bisil Primary School where all nomadic children were put together and taken care of," remembers Marima.

This was just the beginning. Luck struck again when the African Inland Church (AIC) opened a girls' primary school in Kajiado town. She was among the first beneficiaries of the education bursary scheme started to support girls from the community.

Link

"I was among the first group of 80 girls who joined the school located in the heart of Kajiado town, now the headquarters of the larger Kajiado County," she recalls.

Soon after she sat for the Kenya Certificate Primary Education (KCPE) and managed to score highly and proceeded to secondary school.

"However, it was not going to be easy as my father became violent and demanded that I drop out of school unconditionally to get married," she explains.

It was not easy for Marima since her biological mother had died when she was in Standard Five and she had to rely on her stepmothers for upkeep.

The stepmothers never saw the value of her attending school and soon hatched a plot to derail her quest for education. They introduced her to a man who was 20 years older and warned her of dire consequences should she defy the planned marriage.

Flee

"I managed to flee from home and sought refuge at the AIC Primary School where the management came to my rescue and for the next three years allowed me to stay at the school," Marima recalls as she breaks into prolonged hearty laughter.

Much pressure came her way again when it emerged that all the other nine girls from her village had been married off.

She was once again introduced to a primary school head teacher and warned that curses would befall her if she failed to comply with community demands to drop out of school and join her husband.

She declined the offer and instead opted to remain in school which enabled her to complete her secondary schooling at Olkejuado High School.

She passed her exams and successfully applied for admission at the Kenya Institute Mass Communication (KIMC) to train as a TV programmes producer.

The course was, however, rejected by the community who still viewed her as an outcast because majority of other girls were being trained as teachers.

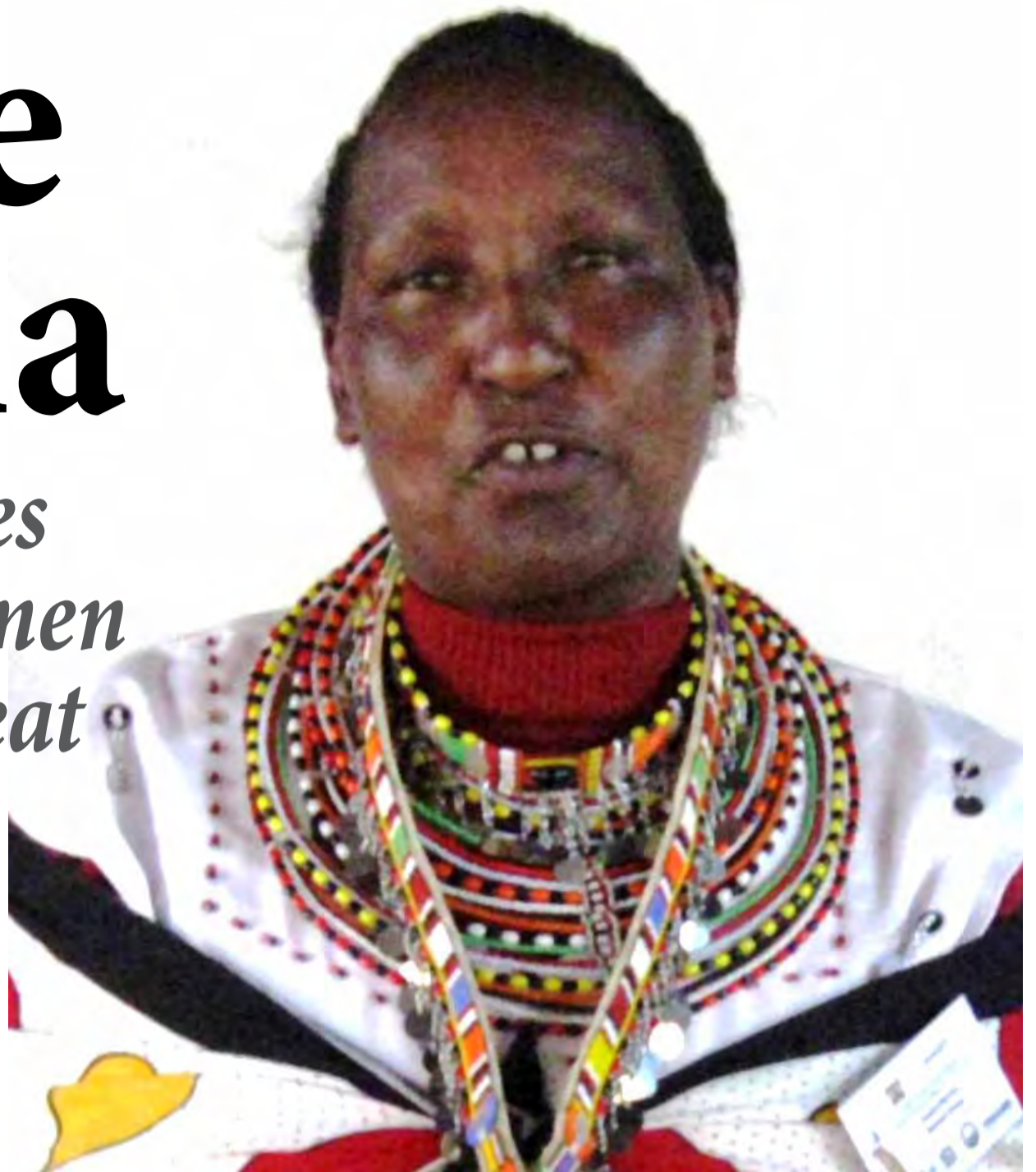
"This time I bowed to the pressure and after working for a short while in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, KBC department. I later left to train as a secretary," she explains.

Marima vividly remembers that during the training, the government would offer allowances to the trainees.

"I would use the training allowances to win the support of her father," she remembers.

"It was during some of my official assignments that I met and courted a young Maasai politician who later married me."

Marima changed jobs severally due to family engagements before she finally landed a job at World Vision. Through



Eunice Marina in a past event. She plans to contest for the Narok County Women Representative seat.

Picture: Kabia Matega

the many international and local forums she has acquired a wealth of knowledge. She quit her job at the World Vision in 1993 and concentrated her energy to rescuing Maasai girls from the cultural practices that contravene their human rights.

Achievements

During her tenure at the World Vision, Marima is credited with having initiated 35 projects in the South Rift where among other things she ensured construction of schools, health centres, water pans and dams. She also belongs to a network of anti-FGM crusaders in Maasailand and through her efforts, Marima has managed to rescue hundreds of girls from the shackles of FGM as well as forced and early marriages.

Marima is the Narok coordinator for the women's regional assembly, a programme of Kenya Women's Political Caucus. The regional assembly was started with a central theme was enhancing women's voice in decision-making, leadership and development.

Marima has assisted women to access small scale business loans, a move that she says has helped alleviate poverty in the community. The rationale behind this strategy is that effective and sustainable support for women's participation in socio-economic development processes must engage and be led by members of that community. This is what Marima has been carrying out for the women in Narok.

"Today Maasai women are competing in business with other communities in market places, kiosks, curio

shops and in many other economic activities. In the past one would only find a Maasai woman in the kitchen or in cowshed milking cows," she explains.

She attributes the unfolding scenario to financial loans availability courtesy of her being in the women's regional assembly.

In the political arena, Marima has played a major role in Narok County and in the South Rift region. In 2002 she was the Rift Valley coordinator of the Narc party campaigns that saw Kibaki elected to the top seat in a landslide victory against his close opponent then Uhuru Kenyatta.

Civic education

"It is through aggressive civic education by various non-governmental organisations that women were convinced to participate in the elections as their democratic right in the voting exercise and hence the reason for achievement in mobilization of women voters targets," observes Marima.

She was a major player in the campaign for the new Constitution and today she is actively engaged in civic education on the new document in the Narok County. Through her efforts, Marima has seen over 2,000 participants from various cluster areas in the Narok County deployed to educate the locals on provisions of the new constitution particularly on matters touching on women and children rights in particular their rights to land ownership and inheritance.

"Women have gained a lot in the new constitution especially on land

ownership and inheritance rights beside mandatory leadership slots," observes Marima as she calls on women of Narok county women to elect her as their Parliamentary Representative.

Marima would have gone for a seat bigger than the women's representative but she knows that the community would not have agreed to support. This is because the community is yet to open up completely to women taking up political leadership position, and that is why she is going for a seat that has been specifically carved out for women.

"I am more comfortable in representing women interests in parliament than being in other general political positions like that of an MP, Governor or Senator."

Going for the women's representative seat comes with other challenges because already another three women have expressed their interest.

The women representative seat could be opening another chapter of political battle in the Maasailand. Marima whose popularity is quickly growing confidently says: "I have put in place all political mechanisms ready to counter opposition in the race for the women representative seat."

Today, Marima is also a member of the Centre for Multi-Democracy (CMD) as in-charge of human rights matters and coordinating the organisation's activities in South Rift area.

Marima is also a member of the Minority Rights Group International and a trustee Africa region among many others.

For Marima, the best weapon to fight poverty is through education and that is why she will put more emphasis on children's education, particularly the girl child who has been a victim of retrogressive cultural practices in the Maasai community.

"It is through aggressive civic education that Maasai women will this time round exercise their democratic right in the election. I am banking on their support to capture the seat"

Peace takes centre stage in Women's agenda

...Ryan Mathenge

Women have been described as a vital tool that can propel the nation to hold peaceful campaigns and transparent general elections.

They said they have powers to educate public on importance of having peaceful campaign and ensure lives and properties are protected.

Central Kenya region although not listed as a hot spot on violence during election time, they said they have a bigger role in ensuring scenarios of 2008 will be a thing of the past in Kenya.

Equality

Led by Kiharu Maendeleo ya Wanawake chairlady Mrs Jecinta Wangari Ng'ang'a, they women leaders drawn from Murang'a County warned politicians to desist culture of incitement.

Forum on role of women towards enhancing peace and security facilitated by African Women Child Features Service in Murang'a saw the leaders speaking in unity to use their numerical powers to ensure Kenya will remain peaceful in the coming general elections.

They said they will use public meeting, churches and their local 'chamas' to preach message of peace and hope to all Kenyans.

Veteran journalist Ms Jane Godia on her part said women as mothers of the nation have a major role to play to ensure peace prevails in Kenya.

"We have to ensure Kenyans live in harmony whether there is election or not," said Godia.

She said for Kenya to ensure peace prevails kinds of conflicts should be noted and find their solutions.

"The best way to avoid perennial conflicts is to know them and seek ways to solve them," said Godia.

Women in Murang'a listed some of the conflicts as their spouses coming home totally drunk ignoring their matrimonial responsibilities.

They disclosed how some of the colleagues especially in rural areas suffer in silent owing to humiliation of their spouses who have turned a



A group of Murang'a women during a meeting organized by the African Woman Child Feature Service. The women have vowed to use public meetings, churches and their local 'chamas' to preach peace and hope to all Kenyans.

Picture: Ryan Mathenge

thorn in the flesh.

They associated some of their men who come home drunk to stealing valuables in the houses selling them to illicit brews dealers.

Ng'ang'a said women are agents of change and can play big roles to ensure Kenya remains united more than before.

"As mothers of this great nation we have a

duty to ensure no blood will be shed as a result of politics as it was witnessed in the last general election," said the women leader.

On development they listed women groups to have played role in transforming their lives.

Educating children and improving their lifestyle they said have been as result of their unity at the village levels.

In health education, they termed scenarios of ignoring their spouses has seen increase of HIV infections.

It was observed that conflict among couples led to betrayal in marriages thus spreading of HIV virus.

They were advised to enhance tolerance with their spouses instead of provoking them.

Women watching as Lichuma takes office

Continued from page 1

Women issues have been treated as an afterthought and currently there has been debate in the country on whether the article on the affirmative action on representation needs to be amended.

The challenge of relegating women's issues as afterthought and especially in times of elections is something that the Commission must take seriously. It is important that the Commission moves women's issues from the margin to the centre.

As a country that is headed for elections, the establishment of the Commission could not have come at a better time.

According to Kasiva women's issues must be at the centre of electing the next leadership of this country. There has been increased women's participation in public and elective position in our neighbouring countries in post conflict such as Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan.

This must be in accordance with the article on equality and freedom from discrimination as stipulated in 27 (3) of the Constitution: "Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social sphere."

"We still do not have specific legislation on how we are going to implement the affirmative action as stipulated in the Constitution. This is the first critical role that the Commission must take up in the context

of the current electioneering period," notes Kasiva.

The Constitution notes in Article 81 (b): The electoral system shall comply with the principle that includes "not more than two thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender".

This has already been an issue of debate with some quarters arguing that there are not enough women to meet at least one third of the number that is needed to constitute Parliament.

Kasiva reiterates: "The Commission must initiate and bring the debate back to Parliament. It needs to be vigilant to ensure the law is not swept under the carpet or watered down."

Kasiva reiterates that "if the next Parliament does not meet the quota as stipulated, it will be unconstitutional and the Commission must ensure that the rule of law is upheld".

These sentiments are echoed by Priscilla Nyokabi, Executive Director Kituo cha Sheria who says that quotas will only be met if women come out to vie for positions. "Women must wake up and vie for

positions such as governors and senators. These are positions that can be taken by women who are already in politics and have made a name for themselves such as the current Members of Parliament," observes Nyokabi. She notes: Women such as Sally Kosgei, Margaret Kamar, Hellen Sambili, Martha Karua (if she changes her mind on presidency), should be the women faces for governor and senator positions.

According to Nyokabi, sitting MPs have the right credentials and should be able to convince the electorate. People are saying they will vote women if they are on the ballot paper."

And this will form part of the work that the National Gender and Equality Commission will have to undertake to ensure that as many women as possible are in the ballot paper so that the two thirds principle is met.

Among its functions the Commission shall —

(a) promote gender equality and freedom from discrimination in accordance with Article 27 of

- the Constitution;
- (b) monitor, facilitate and advise on the integration of the principles of equality and freedom from discrimination in all national and county policies, laws, and administrative regulations in all public and private institutions;
- (c) act as the principal organ of the State in ensuring compliance with all treaties and conventions ratified by Kenya relating to issues of equality and freedom from discrimination and relating to special interest groups including minorities and marginalized persons, women, persons with disabilities, and children;
- (d) co-ordinate and facilitate mainstreaming of issues of gender, persons with disability and other marginalised groups in national development and to advise the Government on all aspects thereof;
- (e) monitor, facilitate and advise on the development of affirmative action implementation policies as contemplated in the Constitution;
- Therefore as Kenyans watch the

pace in which Lichuma and her team will be operating from, women want to be engaged at all levels of consultation. However, according to Dr Samuel Tororei, chairperson Kenyan National Human Rights Commission, the Gender and Equality Commission has a task of demystifying myths and misconceptions around it. "The Gender Commission is a product of human rights fraternity and is a Commission that is most misunderstood," notes Tororei. He observes: "There will be no gender if there are no men. Gender war will only be won if women embrace women, men embrace men, and women embrace men."

According to Tororei, as "we encourage Lichuma and those who wish Kenya well, this country is richer if sexes respect each other".

Dominance

This means that men, who have dominated the political and decision making positions must embrace the fact that even women can be leaders in their own right.

Lichuma and the team that will be leading the Commission will have to embrace these ideas and include both men and women to redress gender inequality and especially with the election process to enable women be part of political scene.

The task ahead will not be easy and Lichuma. Women particularly, want to see issues of their empowerment addressed and made everybody's business.

"We still do not have specific legislation on how we are going to implement the affirmative action as stipulated in the Constitution. This is the first critical step that the Commission must take up in the context of the current electioneering period."

— Faith Kasiva

In graduation speech to women, Obama leaps into gender gap

...By Mark Landler & John H. Cushman Jr.

President Barack Obama, shifting the focus from his recent endorsement of same-sex marriage to what he portrays as a lifelong belief in the essential role of women, told female graduates of Barnard College in New York City recently that they should go out and “fight for a seat at the head of the table”.

In a speech that promoted his record on women’s issues and drew a not-so-subtle distinction with the views of Republicans, including his presumptive challenger, Mitt Romney, Obama urged members of the class of nearly 600 to climb to the top of the corporate ladder or run for public office.

Challenge

The dearth of female lawmakers in Congress, the president declared, was “one reason we’re actually refighting long-settled battles over women’s rights”. The shortage of female chief executives at major companies, he said, was “one reason many workplaces still have outdated policies.”

“It’s up to you to hold the system accountable and sometimes upend it entirely,” Obama said to a friendly audience on the Morningside Heights campus of Columbia University. “It’s up to you to stand up and be heard, to write, and to lobby, to march, to organise, to vote. Don’t be content just to sit back and watch.”

Obama’s remarks came on a hectic day in New York, where he attended two fundraisers and offered his first public response to the mammoth trading losses suffered by JPMorgan Chase, which has renewed demands for stricter regulation of Wall Street.

“JPMorgan is one of the best managed banks there is,” he said while taping an interview on the ABC program “The View” to be broadcast Tuesday. “Jamie Dimon, the head of it, is one of the smartest bankers we got, and they still lost \$2 billion and counting. We don’t know all the details. It’s going to be investigated, but this is why we passed Wall Street reform.”

“You could have a bank that isn’t as strong, isn’t as profitable managing those same bets and we might have had to step in,” Mr. Obama added.

At Barnard, the president referred only obliquely to Wall Street, saying, “Some folks in the financial world have not exactly been model corporate citizens.” Instead, he kept the focus squarely on women’s issues.

Squabbles

Squabbles over federal financing of Planned Parenthood and coverage of contraceptive services have emboldened Democrats who believe they can exploit a gender gap in the November election. Obama tried to leap into that gap on Monday, with a speech that drew heavily on his childhood, reared by a single mother and an ambitious but frustrated grandmother; his marriage to

a strong-willed professional woman; his high hopes for his two daughters; even his cabinet, filled with accomplished women, from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis.

At one point, after assuring the crowd that “all of you will help lead the way,” Obama cheerfully acknowledged he was pandering. “I recognise that’s a cheap applause line when you’re giving a commencement at Barnard,” he said.

Much of Obama’s address offered the bromides common to such speeches. At times, he recited standard policy messages on health care, education and alternative energy sources. At other times, he mixed fatherly advice with thoughts of his own daughters and reminiscences of his younger days.

Yet the timing gave it an unmistakable political subtext. Hours before Obama spoke, the Romney campaign and the Republican National Committee circulated reminders via

Twitter and e-mail about how tough the job market has been for college graduates in the past few years.

Democrats

For the last several months, Democrats have tried to leverage women’s issues against Republicans, attacking them for targeting Planned Parenthood, for resisting Obama’s contraception mandate, and over the Paycheck Fairness Act, which Senate Republicans have rejected.

In the latest skirmish, the parties are battling over competing versions of the Violence Against Women Act, a measure that usually sails through Congress without controversy.

The Republican-controlled House this week is set to vote on a basic extension of the act, which aids local law enforcement agencies and finances shelters and other programs for battered women. That has set up a showdown with Senate Democrats, who have already passed legislation that would expand

efforts to reach Indian tribes and include same-sex couples in programs for domestic violence.

Obama cited the travails of Lilly Ledbetter, for whom his administration’s equal pay law is named, as well as pioneering legislation pushed by two senators, Barbara A. Mikulski, Democrat of Maryland, and Olympia J. Snowe, Republican of Maine.

Still, his tone was upbeat and he was on familiar ground. Obama’s sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng, graduated from Barnard in 1993. Ten years earlier, he graduated from Columbia. (“I know there can be a little sibling rivalry here,” he said.)

Upbeat

Obama later spoke at a fundraiser, where one of the hosts, Ricky Martin, the openly gay pop star, said he admired the president for his courage in endorsing same-sex marriage.

For his part, Obama said: “I want everyone treated fairly in this country. We have never gone wrong when we’ve extended rights and responsibilities to everybody. That doesn’t weaken families; that strengthens families.”

Jennifer Steinhauer contributed reporting. Courtesy of New York Times



US President Barack Obama congratulates grandaunts at Morningside Heights Campus of Columbia University. He challenges female graduates to climb the top of the corporate ladder or run for public office.

“The shortage of female chief executives at major companies was one reason many workplaces still have outdated policies.”

Political parties abuse the special seats spirit

...By Noor Shija

One of the major wins for women of Tanzania was the inclusion of a provision in the Constitution of United Republic of Tanzania that created the special seats to increase women’s participation in politics.

Article 66 of the constitution defines 30 per cent of the seats in parliament as ‘special seats’. These seats are allocated to political strength and only to those which win at least five per cent of the votes in a general election.

Evidence

Evidence shows that indeed, this provision has helped to significantly increase the number of women in Tanzania Parliament.

By end of 2011, there were 126 women in the parliament, majority of whom had come through the special seats requirement. This translates to 35 per cent in the house whose total number of MPs stands at 357.

Of the 126 women, 21 were elected in the constituencies, with 19 of them coming from CCM, one from Chadema and another from NCCR-Mageuzi.

Those who were nominated through the special seats were 102, distributed as follows:

CCM, 67 MPs, 25 Chadema and 10 CUF.

The other parties, TLP and UDP did not get five per cent or more of the votes, hence did not benefit from the special seats provision.

These special seats are distributed to special categories within the population. The CCM, for instance, has one position for each of the different institutions like NGOs, trade unions, disabled people, people with albinism and universities.

While the provision of special seats has seen the number of women increase in parliament at an impressive rate, questions are being asked if it is indeed bringing the value that was envisaged.

“I think the special seats provision has been turned into a personal thing where leaders of political parties use it to reward their friends, families and cronies with little regard as to whether these people are qualified or understand the issues of the special groups they purport to represent,” observes Juma Mohammed.

Abuse

The reason for this concern is that while the concept of special seats is good, political parties seem to be abusing it by pushing through candidates not based on merit, but on other factors.

The biggest problem is the process used to

nominate these representatives. For example, civil servants are prohibited from benefiting from special seats, but this is happening.

In CCM there are public servants who have benefited from special seats. In the 2000 elections, for example, Margaret Sitta came to parliament through the special seat route to represent the trade unions. However, the workers who she said she was representing claimed they do not know her.

There are those who allege that for the five years Sitta was in parliament, she was only answerable to CCM and not to the workers, meaning she did not represent the workers’ interests.

Special seats

Other sectors that have raised storm is the special seats representative of the NGOs. It has also been claimed that those who represent the civil society have been selected based on factors other than merit. Some of them have never been seen to push for social and economic issues advocated by the very organisations they purport to represent.

The story is not different in the opposition parties. In Chadema, there is what has come to be known as the Chadema family. There have been complaints that to be nominated through special

seat in this party, one must be a relative or have other relationships with one of its top leaders.

Recently, Uhuru publications ran a story on Chadema family in Parliament which indicated how close family members had benefited immensely through the special seats.

Those related to Chadema officials as daughters and sisters among other relatives were the main beneficiaries.

In CUF, party members complained publicly about the issue of special seats saying to be nominated a person needs to have money to corrupt their way through. Corruption has affected the quality of representation, party members claimed.

MPs who have won their special seats through these means are not representing the interest of the very special groups they are expected to speak for. Instead they have been accused of pushing their own agenda and that of their masters.

As Tanzania rewrites its constitution, there is need to revisit this issue of special seats and put in place mechanisms that will ensure the system is not abused.

Stakeholders from civil society and private sector need to make submissions to the Constitution Review Commission on how best to implement this noble concept.

Women up their game

...By Robert Wanjala

Women have fought many battles in their pursuit for equality and respect in society. Theirs has been a rocky path filled with tearful tales of brutality, dehumanization and even death.

From the beaches of the Indian Ocean to the shores of Lake Victoria, women have risked their lives for the liberation of their gender.

From the legendary Mekatilile Wa Menza to the late Nobel Laureate Wangari Mathai; from the elderly Phoebe Asiyo to the brave Martha Karua, Kenyan women have struggled to defeat negative cultural practices that dehumanise them.

As Kenyans prepare for the next general elections, women must strategise on how to win more elective positions since the constitution has expanded the space for their gaining power.

High Education Minister Prof. Margaret Kamar says women's empowerment on electoral laws ahead of general election 2012 remains critical.

According to Kamar, the Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission, IEBC and other Constitutional stakeholders should intensify civic education on key laws to enable not only women but all Kenyans make informed choices in the next polls.

"Many Kenyans and especially women are not conversant with the new election and political party laws and this may hinder their effective participation in the coming polls," Kamar observes.

On the issue of banning politicians from fundraising Kamar says it is timely and will increase chances for women's participation.

"The election law is good for it stops some male politicians who often use their resources through fundraising to influence votes," she observes.

According to Kamar, political fields are white and women should go for the all seats as enshrined in the constitution and not merely to fulfil the one third gender rule.

"Although they have fewer resources that could assemble effective political campaigns, women aspirants have started raising funds through alternatives despite fundraising being banned

by election law. Our main concerns and which may disadvantage most women is the widespread ignorance on the new laws," reiterates the legislator.

But despite the electoral laws ignorance, Moira Chepkok is bubbling with confidence as she strategizes on how to test political waters for the first time during in the coming elections. The retired banker says she is ready to tackle the men and all the cultural obstacles on her path.

"Women should not tie themselves down to the one third representation as stipulated in the Constitution. The political window is wide open. Women should know there are other seats available to compete for," says Chepkok.

She argues that experience in the Rift Valley shows that women have what it takes to lead. The region leads in women representation in the current parliament.

Chepkok says that women can offer credible, accountable, transparent and integrity based leadership. "Women have in most cases remained good stewards of family resources in spite of the lesser role they play in African family set ups," she claims.

Chepkok is reluctant to disclose which seat she has set her eyes on but says she is warming up for county seats when the time comes.

According to Martha Ndogoto, programme coordinator of the Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA) resource disparities may hinder possible female candidates.

Ndogoto says her organisation has been on women capacity building mission mainly on peace and political processes across the country.

"Winning in the coming elections may not entirely depend on the resource power but sound policies and networking with likeminded groups," observes Ndogoto.

"Our partnership with women is

"Winning in the coming elections may not entirely depend on the resource power but sound policies and networking with likeminded groups."

— Martha Ndogoto



Women leaders and members of Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association (KEWOPA) attending a meeting in Eldoret.



According to Nancy Koech, a programme coordinator with Mercy Corp, despite the almost level political play field, cultural issues continue to undermine women's resolve to exercise their democratic right.

"Social dynamics and community systems have given more say to men than women," Koech explains. She notes that most women fear participating in politics due to intimidation and insecurity that characterise campaign periods.

Nevertheless, Koech postulates that women need to build their financial base and expand their grassroots and national networks.

Mercy Corps has been building women's capacity through grassroots 'women/youth Bunges'. The initiative sponsored by USAID is aimed at engaging and empowering women and youths economically, freeing them from dependency.

Engaging youths who form the large percentage in society, Koech says this would reduce poverty and idleness hence snatching them away from hell-bent-politicians who have been using them for political expediency in the past.

Former assistant Minister for Health, Dr Enoch Kibunguchy says that men should create an environment conducive for women to thrive in politics.

"Our women are showing us that they are able. The focus of what one has below the belt as opposed to above the neck is destroying our society," observes Kibunguchy, adding that violence must be tamed to enable women actively participate in politics.

The Catholic Bishop of Eldoret Diocese Cornelius Korir, says that peace is critical to enable all Kenyans participate in politics.

not about funding but imparting leadership, lobbying and advocacy skills," she reiterates.

However Ndogoto says COPA can provide linkages with prospective funding organisations to enable women battle out with well resourced male politicians.

And while Chepkok bemoans the fact that women are reluctant to support one another, Ndogoto encourages women who are unwilling to venture into politics to champion for female candidacy.

However, Chepkok is not the only woman steaming with political ambition. Lillian Kiptoo, 43 is an old hand in politics and says empowering women on life skills remain her passion.

When not in politics Kiptoo will be busy traversing villages talking to her fellow women on matters of new farming technologies, use of natural energy in home cooking and sowing the seed into their minds on how to challenge stereotype minds.

The mother of six and district coordinator, Women Bunge (grassroots women parliament) says education for all will top her agenda if elected. "An educated society is an equally empowered community, socially and economically," she notes.

Vying for women representative in Elgeyo-Marakwet County, Kiptoo observes this year's political game plan may not rely much on one's experience and finances. "The country is in deficit of visionary leaders. I am ready to provide my rich menu of leadership," she asserts.

Coming from humble background, Kiptoo, a Form Two dropout says her political strategy is simple. She is a well

known village girl who has worked tirelessly with various civil societies in the area and has the blessings right from the church leaders to community elders not to mention fellow women.

"My support will come from friends whom I have established as I go about my duties mobilising grassroots women to discuss issues affecting us and our families," she notes.

However, Kiptoo's biggest hurdle remains defeating male chauvinism. "Our community is still caught up in the retrogressive culture that thinks a woman is a child and not fit for instruments of power," she bemoans.

And although this will be her second attempt into politics, Kiptoo is oblivious of the difficulties women candidates are likely to face.

Kiptoo, who is the chairlady of Kenya National Federation of Agriculture Production (KENFAP) says all women should stand up and be counted in this year's election in spite of the barriers.

"In 2007 general election I came second in a nine-man civic leadership contest. Today women in my backyard are a disappointed lot by the incumbent leadership. They long for meaningful change the new constitution has promised to us all and it's only through a woman — obviously seen, felt and tasted the deadly struggles that come with destitution," she asserts.

Although those who are well financed may derail her political dream, Kiptoo says efforts through USAID sponsored projects — women and youths economic empowerment through implementing agent — Mercy Corps; election laws awareness is still wanting and may not only ruin her chances but also for other women seeking elective positions.

Bungoma Women vow to support their own in the coming election

...By Aggrey Buchunju

Women in Bungoma County have made a joint stand to vie for all political seats during the next general election.

They also vowed to elect their fellow women in various political positions in the country as opposed to voting for men.

Led by Maendeleo ya wanawake Western province treasurer, Irene Muronji, Bungoma town based lawyer, Elizabeth chungu and Teso North District Commissioner (DC) Josephine Onunga, the women declared that they are no longer enemies of themselves.

They used the platform to urge women in the other 46 countries to rally behind women candidates in order to strengthen their voice in advocating for gender and women issues countrywide.

Muronji asked women who have

developed appetite for elective seats countrywide to arm themselves with academic qualifications as is required by the constitution.

She challenged those with academic certificates to immediately enroll for other relevant courses.

"Women aspirants must strive to get all the requisite documents now so as not to be barred from participating in the election when time comes," she cautioned.

Muronji at the same time asked those who may not acquire all the necessary documents to feel proud and support those who have.

Chungu urged women to contest for all positions arguing that there are no special seats for them to warrant one third presentation in all decision making organs.

She, however, lauded the new constitution saying that it has so many gains for women.

As a result she asked women to vote

for fellow women when elections are called in order for them to effectively defend the gains.

"The new constitution does not provide for forced inheritance of widows. As women we can only live to celebrate this gain if many of us are elected in political positions," she said.

Onunga asked women to be conversant with the clauses in the constitution that concern them.

She reminded the women that the document gives them equal opportunities with men and challenged them to read and understand it.

"Let the document be a manual to live with because it recognises the right of all Kenyans to education and to own property," she said.

Onunga said that it is the responsibility of women to ensure that families are stable.

"Let us value family structure by respecting our husbands and utilizing farms property," she said.



UN Women Country Director Zebib Kavuma (Centre) during the meeting. Picture: Aggrey Buchunju

Onunga told Kenyan women to emulate their counterparts in Uganda in order to build strong family values.

She claimed that men in Uganda have no sexual desire outside their matrimonial beds because women

there know how to care and treat their spouses.

"My area of jurisdiction borders Uganda and I can confidently tell you that families there are built on strong values and love," Onunga added.

Njoki and Kiraithe promises justice to rape victims

...By HENRY OWINO

Sexual offenders will now be dealt with firmly as police and the judiciary commits themselves into stopping the heinous acts.

Njoki Ndungu, Judge in the Supreme Court and Erick Kiraithe, Police Spokesman took personal pledges in support of the campaign to stop rape and gender violence in conflict. They vowed to provide legal actions in their respective jurisdictions and ensure victims' justice prevails.

The duo made the commitments during the Week of Action Campaign Resolution for Kenya at an International forum organized to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict in the country held at Freedom Corner of Uhuru Park, Nairobi. The campaign launch was attended by civil societies, survivors, governmental representatives and foreign dignitaries.

Campaign

The campaign targeted four countries; Burma, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya where the launch went concurrently. The event was also held in other conflict prone countries around the world including Liberia, Canada to mention just but a few.

The campaign's advisory committee is comprised of 25 organizations working at the international, regional, and community levels to support survivors and stop rape.

According to Njoki Ndungu, rape is the most serious crime in the community. She said rape is similar to robbery with violence and should not be taken lightly because it leaves a woman with a permanent scar.

"Rape is actually robbery with violence because once you fall a victim, you lose dignity that is hardly restored. Rape is a serious offense that should not be taken lightly. In fact the Sexual Offense Act 2003 now redefines rape and people need to familiarize themselves with Chapter 42 of the Act," Njoki explained.

The Supreme Court Judge clarified that any crime is treated equally though the penalty does differ depending on the weight and category of offense. She urged the public to play their part as a community and nation by fighting the criminal activities.

To the police force, Njoki urged the Kiraithe the police spokesman to deploy more police officers to the slum areas to protect the residents since such places are prone to criminal activities.

Empowerment

"Today I ask men in Kenya to stop violence, rape and any criminal activity and instead engage in incoming generating activities to provide for the families so that we stop hearing of more cases of women beating their husbands. Men you need to be responsible!" asked Njoki.

"Remember, No means No, nothing else!" affirmed Njoki. Kiraithe, the Police Spokesman, warned members of the public against harboring rapists and other gangsters in the community and expect the police force to arrest them. He regretted that in most cases, the members of the public always shield the criminals making it difficult for police to arrest such a person.

The Police Spokesman expressed his disappointments saying victims of rape in most cases never find justice since cases do take long in courts giving the criminals advantage of walking scot free despite police efforts to arrest them.

"What surprises me in this country is the duration a case takes in court before it is resolved. For instance, someone may steal your jacket and the jacket gets torn before the case is concluded. Is this not impunity?" Kiraithe posed.

Kiraithe said the level of impunity in the country is high and must be dealt with collectively not just by the government but by every individual. Community policing he stated is the key to crime eradication as police cannot reach every corner of the country but the public continue to undermine the initiative by providing asylum to the criminals.

"As much as the police force is undergoing reforms, we need to reexamine our values as a society because the same errant police officer is a product of the same society. They are our brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and thus the need to support the reforms," suggested Kiraithe.

He noted that most rapists are always known by the victims yet no action is taken against the offenders due to lack of sufficient evidence.

"Our Courts function under stipulated laws and exhibit is mandatory for any case to proceed and for victim's justice. As much as Police do their work in arresting the criminals, the victims must also play their role," urged Police Spokesman.

He therefore called upon the community to be in the forefront in rejecting criminal groupings in their estates, villages or communities by reporting them to nearest police stations.

Huge gap yawns for women in political leadership



...By Henry Kahara

Cabinet Minister Dr Sally Kosgey shares a word with nominated MP Millie Odhiambo during the Kenya Women Parliamentarians Association (KEWOPA) meeting.

For long East Africa women have been kept a side in leadership positions despite the fact that they have taken active role in the country's political, economic and social life.

Despite this it is estimated that women form over slightly 50 per cent of the total population, meaning they are the majority voters in both parliamentary and civic elections.

During the pre-independence history of Kenya and the struggle for self-determination against British domination have numerous cases of women who supported the cause in many ways.

However in the 1963 general election that saw Kenya into independence not a single woman was elected to parliament. It was until 1969 when the first woman, Mrs Grace Onyango was elected into. In 1974 general election the number increased slightly to four with the election of Dr Julia Ojiambo, Nyiva Mwendwa and Chelgat Mutai with Onyango getting her second term.

Trend

The trend never changed much up to 1990s when the multiparty came to be. Speaking with journalists at Bomas of Kenya during the launching of Kenya Women Charter Water and Irrigation Minister Charity Ngilu said that this was a turning point.

Ngilu says that before there was only one party KANU which was male dominated and sometimes they used to give a direct nomination to the people of their (party's leader) choice.

"Before we used to have one party (KANU) which was male dominated and it was a nightmare for a woman to get its ticket," she observes.

Ngilu expressed optimism that the number of women in decision making positions will increase this time due to the new constitutional dispensation.

Constitution

Article 81(b) of the new Constitution states that: "Not more than two thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender."

Currently Kenya has only 22 women members of parliament, compared with Uganda which has 70, Tanzania has more than 30 per cent while 56 per cent of Rwanda's parliamentarians are women.

Rwanda is among the 17 countries in the world with the highest women representation in the world surpassing its law in Affirmative Action of 30 per cent representation. May be this has been greatly contrib-

uted by the genocide experience which is still very fresh in many women's mind with gender violence being a tool that was commonly used.

Improvement

Rwandans have made tremendous improvements on the issue of child rights with particular reference to child marriages.

Forced child marriages are now illegal with serious penalties for the rape and of children and babies increased substantially.

Furthermore there have been programmes to educate the general public on the values equal rights of women.

According to Joy Masheti, a programme officer with the Caucus for Women Leadership, a country cannot develop when one gender dominates in leadership.

Masheti attributes the progress Rwanda has made from endorsement of women leadership. "Development can only be witnessed when both genders are given priority," she says.

In Kenya it was until last year when the Parliament passed the law that bans female circumcision. In 1996 a motion seeking to ban female circumcision was defeated in because there were no women to support it.

"For long our sisters have been undergoing FGM, with nobody raising questions



"Before we used to have one party (KANU) which was male dominated and it was a nightmare for a woman to get its ticket."

— Charity Ngilu.

until the time when we have gotten at least a large number when the motion sailed through," notes Masheti.

She adds: "This is an indication that if women are given a chance we can record high development rate in our nation."

Uganda too has embraced women's leadership and today its Parliament has about 70 women. This came about after the affirmative action policy in decision making policy which is closely related to coming in power of the National Resistance Government in 1986.

Article 32 (1) of the Ugandan constitution spells out that the core elements of affirmative action. The provision trenches applying affirmative action in favour of groups discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history or custom. It also indicates that the intention of committing affirmative action is to redress imbalances which exist against the marginalised.

Study

In Tanzania, the introduction of special seats for women did not lead to an increased number of women in parliament. A survey conducted by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) indicates the possibility of many women holding higher office in parliament as a nightmare.

The report further says that in Tanzania all the machineries of Parliament are dominated by men. The Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Clerk of the National Assembly as well as the Attorney General are all men. Also eight out of nine Parliamentary Standing Committees are led by men.

Women joining politics through special seats are not necessarily accountable to the majority of women, particularly those who do not belong to political seats.

Like Kenya, in Tanzania women do not feature very strongly in the country's cabinet, which is the main body that advises the President on all matters of the government including public policy.

During the launch of Kenya National Women Charter, women leaders from across the country exposed the dirty tricks men candidates aspiring for political leadership positions in the country use to harass them.

This indicated that some men in Kenya are yet to concur that women too can be leaders and with the new Constitution women are watching the political space keenly to see whether Kenyans will honour the new law.

Working to change perceptions among people living with disability

...By Faith Muiruri

As a young girl she watched helplessly as persons with disability suffered from injustices directed at them by 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, Hanisa 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 on hostility and inability by the officers to communicate with those who were deaf. In schools, they had to compete equally with physically able children.

Images of emaciated people with disabilities strewn on the streets stung fiercely under the calm face of reality.

"And this solidified my resolve to crusade for the rights of disabled persons," explains Zaja who herself is also disabled. To get to work well for the physically challenged, Zaja joined the Association of Disabled Persons in Coast Province and has never looked back.

Resolve

"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," Zaja observes. Today she serves as the chairperson of the Association of Persons living with Disabilities in Coast Province.

Her passion to empower the disabled persons has enabled her to harness the hidden potential among persons living with disabilities and motivate them to achieve with superior results.

With the help of development partners, Zaja and members of her association have set up a workshop that deals in tailoring and carving as a way of generating income to help uplift their standards of livelihoods.

"I work with people in need of help to manage their daily lives. The job not only involves helping them 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.

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

Her entire life has been inspired by a sense of need to reach out to others in every little way.

"I have been paying school fees for six children with disabilities because I know if they are empowered they can take charge of their lives instead of being beggars," she says.

Her indisputable level of credibility has helped bring out an incredibly high level of integrity which has earned her the tag "mother-in-law" due to the strong belief in equal opportunities.

Simplicity and humility are the

hallmarks that define her work. Zaja has been identifying people in need and fulfilling those needs.

"It is the inner satisfaction that leads me to give more of myself to the people than thinking of what the world thinks of me," she explains.

"The job needs you to have a big heart. I have been using my own resources to empower the disabled persons. I recently set up a cyber cafe where disabled persons learn new skills on IT free of charge," says Zaja. She explains: "The cyber is open to other members of the public and the proceeds from the enterprise go into uplifting the livelihoods of the disabled people who use and work in the cyber."

Impunity

Zaja also works with the local District Social Development officer to link them with essential resources within the community and protect vulnerable ones by ensuring that their best interests are not ignored.

Her hard work and perseverance has earned her recognition as an ardent defender of the rights of the disabled persons in Coast Province. She has received numerous awards among them 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.

Her story is one of determination and at times sheer stubbornness. She has been pushing MPs to support the disabled cause and they have helped in initiating projects that empower the disabled community in Coast Province.

Aspiration

Zaja is seeking nomination for the Mombasa County representative of the disabled. She is optimistic that she will win the seat to enable her initiate more projects that will help transform the livelihoods of persons living with disability.

Among issues she intends to address once elected include education, health, transport sector and also become the voice of the disabled community.

Zaja notes that persons with disability have continued to pay school fees for primary education despite the introduction of the Free Primary Education.

"Majority have been forced to drop out of school as most parents can hardly afford to keep their disabled children in school," she observes.

She says that most of the special schools are boarding facilities and, therefore, unless they are fully supported, disabled persons are being

"Although most people have dismissed my plans to join politics I intend to remain focused to help ensure that justice becomes an overriding factor in society"



Hanisa Zaja speaks out on her plans to contest for the Mombasa County Representative for people with disability. She expresses her optimism that she will win the seat.

Picture: Faith Muiruri

denied their right to attain basic education through the free and compulsory education policy initiated by the government.

Challenges

Further, she says, most health facilities in the county lack physiotherapy clinics that are important for disabled persons. Majority rely on the facility at Port Ritz which also serves Kilifi, Kwale and Taita Taveta counties. Zaja's plan is to push to have all health facilities equipped with the clinics to guarantee disabled persons easy access.

She notes that the transport sector has not been upgraded to accommodate the needs of the disabled persons who use more money on public transportation.

She says that disabled persons are still being marginalised including in the political process. She cites the ongoing processes across the country to launch political parties where she notes that the disabled have been excluded.

She urges that there be civic education for persons living with disabilities so they can understand the Political Parties Act as well as the Electoral Act.

"Unless accountability is upheld during the nominations by the political parties, persons with disabilities may not realise any meaningful representation," notes Zaja.

According to Zaja most political parties are likely to nominate their cronies to occupy seats set aside for special groups such as the disabled. "We are not certain that we will get proper representation since individuals who may be handpicked may end up sitting in the county assemblies but fail to address the aspirations of people living with disabilities," Zaja observes.

She adds: "The nomination should be done at the county level, where people are allowed to choose individuals with the capacity to deliver once nominated to respective positions."

Nomination

According to Zaja the new Constitution provides for ministerial appointment for persons with disability in every ministry. This means that more disabled persons will be included in decision making processes and thereby alleviate their suffering.

She proposes that police reforms should embrace the sign language and Braille to effectively provide services to the physically challenged persons.

Zaja, 38, is a mother of two children and married. She went to Port Ritz School for the Physically Handicapped and Mama Ngina Girls' Secondary School. She has a Diploma in Community Development.

Zaja says that if elected, she will ensure that every County sets up centres similar to the Bombolulu Training Centre to meaningfully engage disabled persons and promote relationship synergy and consensus between all levels of development to deliver spectacular results.

Women faces HIV burden

...By Henry Neondo

In Africa, women and girls carry a disproportionate burden of the HIV epidemic, constituting 59 percent of all people living with HIV. The prevailing gender inequalities, including gender-based violence among other factors, increase women's and girls' risk of HIV infection.

This has made it difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular MDGs 3 (gender equality), 4 (child health), 5 (maternal health), and 6 (HIV).

The African Union's Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) is one such initiative in support of the MDGs, specifically addressing the reduction of maternal mortality in Africa.

Protection

"Empowering women and girls to protect themselves against HIV infection and gender-based violence is non-negotiable in the AIDS response. Yet, many countries are not delivering the results needed to achieve the MDGs 3, 4, 5 and 6," said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé.

He said that forms such as the GlobalPOWER Women Network mobilise women leaders to hold governments accountable to the commitments they made on women and girls.

Women parliamentarians, leading African women entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, and development partners from Africa and beyond in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital for the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa High Level Meeting.

Strategy

The meeting provided a strategic political platform to accelerate game-changing approaches to HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights responses for women and girls.

More than 300 participants attended the meeting that discussed ways of eliminating new HIV infections among children, keeping mothers alive and maternal and child health.

Participants cited resource mobilisation, sustainable financing and accountability as key in the fight against gender imbalances.

The meeting led to the "Harare Call for Action" to advance women's empowerment and gender equality through HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights responses.

"To achieve the vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths, it is critical to recognise women and girls as key agents in making this vision a reality—society has to invest in the health of women and girls," said Thokozani Khupe, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe and President of the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa.

In line with the foregoing, Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission said leadership at country level must work to deliver the commitment made over the years, which appear more relevant today than ever before.

"Synergies should be created between the several hitherto vertical interventions, especially between HIV programmes and those of Sexual and Reproductive health," he said.

The aim of the GlobalPOWER Women Network is to establish networks among women leaders and parliamentarians to share experiences and approaches to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Barely out of teenage, Kuresha vows to bring change in Tana River

...By **Carolyn Oyugi**

She is a very optimistic woman, for her nothing is difficult if only you put your heart and strength to it.

These are the thoughts of Kuresha Mohamed, a young woman from a minority tribe who has witnessed and experienced injustices in her community and mostly to women.

What is happening around Kuresha is not right and she will not sit and watch another generation of women go through the same problems her community has undergone. She wants to see change and believes she has to do something to bring about that change.

"I want to see change in my community, that is just the starting point before I spread my wings and bring change to a bigger part of the county and eventually the whole country in future," says Kuresha during an interview with the Kenyan Woman.

"I believe that one has to be realistic in her ambition in order to achieve success. You must be willing to do the small things to the few people around you before going out to a bigger group," she explains.

Ambition

Kuresha is aspiring for the ward representative seat in Garsen North, Tana River County.

"My area has been a victim of neglect from the Government, we have poor infrastructure, the transport system is a nightmare, the climate is also not conducive for agriculture and so we always have to buy food," she says adding that this has been a major obstacle to development.

Tana River has also been in need of water supply for a very long time. "We depend on Tana River which is very dangerous because it is infested

with crocodiles and there are constant reports of people dying at the river after being attacked by the crocodiles," she explains adding that the river has been receding: the water reduces during the dry seasons and bursts its banks during rainy season.

While it is cultural that women must fetch water, the crocodiles in Tana River leave women most vulnerable to risk of attacks.

"Most women in my area are illiterate, for that reason they have not read the Constitution on their own so as to understand and make informed decisions over their lives," she says.

Ignorance

According to Kuresha, most women in Tana River Constituency are ignorant when it comes to Constitution matters. They listen and follow what their husbands or male figures in their lives say.

"This is deep rooted to an extent that they vote for the candidates that their husbands support," says Kuresha.

"In the past, during the 'mlolongo' way of voting, the men would carry their wives' national identification and voter's cards so as to force them to vote for a particular party," she notes.

Kuresha would like to see more civic education done so as to have a more informed citizens who will then realise the full benefits of the new constitution.

She is out to end this and advocate for girl child education so as to have a more educated generation of women in future.

"I want people to judge me by my actions and what I can do for the community and not by my gender."

— **Kuresha Mohamed,**

"I have to start now, there is no better time than this and all those who think 23 years is too young are very wrong. This is the time when I have the energy, I don't have to wait till I am old and retired for me to get into politics," she reiterates.

Kuresha, the young mother of a three-year old son wants to be an example to other women in her community. She wants to show others that it is possible to be a woman, wife as well as mother and still excel in politics.

Inhabitants

"I want people to judge me by my deeds, what I can do for the community and not by my gender," she says adding that women have had to overcome more obstacles than men. "The society has for a long time looked at us as women first before looking at what we can do. People want to know about your private life, whether you are married, if not then why? And this is our time to prove them wrong."

To Kuresha, it is not just about being a leader, it is also about being a good leader. She has been a leader for some time now and she knows all the problems that her community goes through.

"I have been involved in land advocacy projects because I want to stop the many land grabbing cases that have become normal in Tana River. I want to use the political platform to promote equality, I want to create an environment where you don't have to be rich for you to access your rights," she says.



Kuresha Mohamed, the first woman from the Warthei tribe to vie for an electoral position. Despite her young age, she believes that she is among the people who will bring change to her community. Picture: Carolyn Oyugi

Kuresha is the first woman from the Warthei tribe to vie for an electoral position and she knows it will not be a walk over.

"I know there will be challenges but I will fight through. I also know that nothing good comes easily, now more than ever I have to prove that I am equal to the task," she says.

Tana River county is inhabited by three tribes — Pokomo, Orma and the Warthei, the latter being the minority.

"People of my community are pastoralists and this makes it hard to campaign because they are not stationed at one point, worse still the movement from one place to another hinders development," she says.

There is also a lot of tribalism and this leaves Kuresha with three major challenges to fight. One she is a woman, second she is young and third she is from a minority tribe.

"That does not scare me because my husband and my entire family is behind me. I owe my courage and strength to my mother who has been very supportive and has always pushed me whenever I felt weak," she explains.

Kuresha is one of the few women in her community to be educated. She has a Bachelors degree and a diploma in human resource.

She would also like to see a society where girls get married at the right time. "Most girls fall victim of early marriage because they do not go to school. The only way to delay marriage is by ensuring that girls enjoy their right to education. This way we will also reduce the problem of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)," she says.

The struggle has just began and Kuresha believes that she has all that it takes to bring change to Garsen North ward.

Young women must claim their space in politics

...By **Sally Nyakanyanga**

Politics and decision-making in Africa is largely dominated by men and young women are yet to claim their space in this field. In Zimbabwe and indeed in Africa, very few young women occupy positions in politics and decision-making. What has been lacking is the grooming and nurturing of young women to assume political posts within political parties. Traditionally, politics has been known to be a male space. A young man is usually the apparent heir to a throne and as he grows up, he is groomed to occupy that space later on in life. Currently, the struggle for women's representation in decision making positions in all sectors has gathered momentum with state parties having committed to an all inclusive system, which fosters equal representation of both women and men. This inclusive system comes in the form of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development of 2008 which targets 50 per cent representation of women and men in politics and decision-making by 2015.

History

The history of Zimbabwean politics shows that involving young women in politics and decision-making is possible. Vice President Joyce Mujuru became a Cabinet Minister at the

young age of 25 at independence in 1980. In 2000, Flora Bhuka the youngest of government ministers in Zimbabwe at that time became the Minister of State in the Vice President's office, then Joseph Musika. In the 2008 elections, Anastacia Ndhlovu became the youngest Member of Parliament (MP) at the age of 28 under a ZANU-PF ticket.

However, the current political field shows a low representation of younger women in politics as pointed out by Thabitha Khumalo, the Senator for Mabutweni and Deputy Chair of the Constitution Select Committee in the country.

Khumalo said that there has not been much effort in any of the country's political parties to encourage and support young women in politics. "We have a handful of women but it is always the same women being called upon to wear different hats. So what happens when we retire?" posed Khumalo.

Vimbai Nhapi, former Child President in Zimbabwe said that there is a huge gap and young women who are already in positions of influence in political parties are not very active.

Another young woman, Maureen Kademaunga highlighted that it took a lot of courage on her part as very few young women contest for political positions. Kademaunga is the secretary for international relations under the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvan-

girai (MDC-T) Youth Council. She added that resources and resistance from men also impede on young women's involvement in politics. Despite coming from the opposition party, Kademaunga is of the view that the challenges young women face in different political parties are often similar.

Support

Fanny Chirisa, Director of the Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), explained that they have a programme called Empowerment and Capacity Building, where an MP identifies a young woman to act as shadow MP and will be assisting the senior in all matters concerning the constituency.

"We encourage all women especially MPs to identify young women to groom in their constituencies. Young women can then tap from the older crop and be groomed for political positions," Chirisa emphasised.

Kademaunga encourages young women to get organised and make their demands clear by pushing for reforms that recognise the imbalances young women are facing. At this point, deliberate steps need to be taken to get young women into positions of power.

"We should not allow the system to carry on excluding us but stand for our rights so that we can be counted and be included in the de-

cision making of our nations," Kademaunga concluded.

There are many young women who want to be the Johnson-Sirleafs or Joyce Bandas of their countries. Unless deliberate efforts are put in place within political parties and also within political wings of these political parties, the gap in women's representation at all levels of governance will remain.

In her presentation during the Women in Power Conference held in Adelaide in 1994, Joan Kilmer said that, "there is no such thing as being non-political. Just by making a decision to stay out of politics you are making the decision to allow others to shape politics and exert power over you. And if you are alienated from the current political system, then by just staying out of it you do nothing to change it but simply entrench it".

Therefore, young women should also take urgency and ensure that they claim their space in the political field. In future, initiatives such as the Gender Links Gender Justice and Local Government summit should include young women in politics so that they also use the platform to share tips on how to change unequal power relations.

The writer is a freelance writer from Zimbabwe.

Story courtesy of Gender Links Website

Chief tweets to fight gender based violence

...By Steve Mucheru

They are often regarded as a reincarnation of the colonial relic. Tough to the bone, some of the chiefs plying trade in the country are loved and loathed with an equal measure, depending on their performance in the course of duty.

Inheriting the mantle from the colonial masters who used the administrators to collect taxes from peasants, many took the cue and perpetuated the vice in successful regimes, earning a number of enemies while executing their mandate.

But not so for Francis Kariuki the chief of Lanet-Umoja location who has endeared himself to the masses and is fondly referred to as the tweeting chief. The 47-year-old administrator has revolutionised the role of location heads in tandem with fast changing technology.

Chiefs, in yesteryears, were regarded as “less schooled” eager to please their masters as they performed duties with zeal putting them into a collision course with the citizenry, a perception that Chief Kariuki is out to change.

Change

“Since joining the provincial administration, I have always tried to change the image of the much maligned job, putting people’s interest first,” he revealed during the interview.

Tasked with the doubting role, in the crime prone Lanet area, the tweeter chief had his work cut out and the main task was to tackle felony and win the confidence of the residents who were prone to petty thuggery.

Resigned to fate, most of the location residents had lost faith in security agents as criminals continued to torment them almost on daily basis stealing household items causing fear and despondency.

Having his background as a primary school teacher, Chief Kariuki knew communication was of essence if he was to slay the crime dragon and bring sanity in an area that was notorious with criminal activities.

“After much soul searching and consultation, I decided to look for a platform that I would communicate with the locals in case of a crime,” he says.

Communication

And the idea of tweeting was born which seem to be working magic and many local resident connected to him through the tech-savvy communication mode is able to reach him in a flash.

“This way, when a crime is committed in an area, all one need to do is write a short text message, (SMS) and I will in turn send out alerts to those connected to me,” he explained the technology.

Via the expertise, the chief is able to reach a good number of the villagers who would swing in to action and help apprehend criminals causing mayhem. The most common crime was the theft of poultry and house breaking.

Within a short time, criminals in the area who, incidentally, were receiving the alerts had to devise new tricks to escape the arm of the law as they would be apprehended easily before sneaking away from the crime scene.

“The intensified fight against crime has seen a number of social outlaws abandon the risky undertaking or either flee from the area,” said Kariuki.

Initiative

Police and other crime busting departments have been following the chief on tweeter and receive alerts in time to enable them to sufficiently deal with criminal elements. “It has been a win-win situation,” explained chief.

And the tweeting method has not only helped

reduce crime rate but also incidents of gender based violence within the chief’s locality. Many bullies who picked a fight with their spouses with the slightest provocation are having a second thought.

Fearing the alerts would reach many, the perpetrators of the gender crime have been forced to toe the line of face the wrath of their fellow villagers in case an alarm is raised within a certain radius.

“We have seen a great reduction on gender based violence since the tweeting method came into the fore,” explained the season administrator who believes information is power.

Many violators fear their behaviour would land into the chief’s domain, forcing them to reluctantly abandon the retrogressive deeds, a chance that has seen families enjoy relative peace.

“When I took over the job, it was very common to hear alarm bells being raised in homes, a feat attributed to gender based violence,” explains Kariuki.

Measures

The issue of rape has also been addressed as the chief continues to consolidate the gains made by the use of tweeter. “My work has become easier than I anticipated,” he adds.

According to Kariuki, various forms of crimes including domestic violence, rape and defilement cases have drastically reduced since the introduction of tweeting method to relay information.

“Although reported cases of defilement and rape were quite rare, it is almost impossible to hear of them since the introduction of tweeting,” he confides.

Achievement

He says the technology has turned followers to be “brother’s keeper” effectively reducing domestic violence to almost zero digits. This is because many women have been forced to learn how to use the social media which in itself is a form of empowerment.

“Any form of violence is likely to trigger a response from close door neighbours thus keeping in check those advancing the vice. The victims also tweet alerting that they are in trouble,” he explains.

Describing the technology as boon in the fight against crime, Kariuki said he is able to monitor all the activities in his area of jurisdiction and easily indentify trouble shooters and areas prone to crime.

Apart from crime and gender based violence, the chief has been tweeting on health issues, alerting the villagers when health care providers would tour the area to administer various jabs including polio.

Health care givers are having an easy time gaining access to the locals even in the remotest part of the location as the chiefs sends alerts on time with the information reaching more than 90 per cent of the intended consumers.

The technology has transformed the hitherto, sleepy Lanet-Umoja into a communication hub, with those enjoying phone service and connected to the chief being updated at each passing minute.

The technology has seen the location stalwart unite for a purpose despite the area being cosmopolitan. “It’s hard to tell apart people from different ethnic groups,” says Kariuki.

A man of many hats, the former primary school teacher is a cleric with the United Methodist Church and preaches the word without fear. “The religious background has been a catalyst that I need to further boost my work,” he says.

For now, Kariuki is a celebrity of sorts as he continues to earn accolades for choosing to fight crime and other vices using a medium rarely witnessed among people of his rank and file.

However, knowing that criminals always up their game in a bid to dodge security agents, Kariuki is equal to the task and ready to explore other innovative ways of keeping criminals at bay.



Francis Kariuki the chief of Lanet-Umoja location fondly referred to as the tweeting chief. He uses tweeter to solve problems in his Sub-location. Picture: Steve Mucheru

Government partners with industry to distribute free sanitary pads

...By Henry Owino

Government in partnership with African Cotton Industries has launched a programme under which free sanitary towels will be provided to public primary schools across the country.

The programme is expected to benefit 443,858 needy girls of whom 4,114 will be drawn from public primary schools from 82 targeted districts.

The introduction of the free sanitary towels is expected to continue in the 2011/2012 financial years and subsequent financial years. The government will allocate Ksh240 million in the financial year for the sanitary towels as a start.

The Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, assured the school girls that government was committed to providing quality education and training for all. He added that gender equality remain important benchmarks in government in quest to educate young people.

"We are not launching the sanitary towels programme in a vacuum. We do it as part of the comprehensive Gender Policy in Education Sector that aims at reducing existing gender disparities in access, retention, transition and achievement in education," Prime Minister, Raila clarified.

The premier echoed that government is concerned about girls who continue to drop out of school or fail to enroll in greater numbers compared to boys. He further observed survival rates for girls in school are still low compared to those of boys which lead to low completion rates among girls at all levels.

"Lack of appropriate sanitary facilities and access to sanitary towels for girls has been identified as a deterrent to schooling," Raila cautioned.

The Prime Minister made the remarks during the official launch of sanitary towels programme held at Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), Nairobi.

Raila stated studies done in Kenya by various organizations reveal that approximately 500,000 girls miss at four days of schooling every month because they are unable to afford sanitary pads. This he alluded amounts to 10-25 per cent of pupil-teacher contact time lost.

"It puts our girls at a disadvantage against their male counterparts. It affects the performance of girls in examinations. In the past, this problem has partly been addressed through isolated provision of sanitary towels to girls in some schools by some of our partners. The impact of such an approach has been largely minimal," the Premier mentioned.

Raila appealed to more partners to supplement the government's efforts of maintaining girls from disadvantaged backgrounds in school through programmes like the one launched.

Through the programme, Raila said the government has provided the needy girls with sanitary towels to cater for three terms starting term two of the 2012 school year. He added in some selected districts in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) regions, the girls would get additional wears to accompany the sanitary towels.

Prime Minister however, observed that due to inadequacy of funds, not all needy girls have benefited from the programme. "As we speak, about 2.6 million girls, that is 2.2 million from primary and 400,000 from secondary schools require support to access sanitary towels. About 300,000 of them particularly in ASAL districts will require additional wears in addition to sanitary towels," regretted the Prime Minister.

The cost of achieving the target is estimated at Ksh2.6 billion. He therefore appealed for public private partnership to support the needy girls to enable them attend school regularly. Raila asked Treasury to increase the budgetary allocation for the vital initiative in the 2012/2013 financial year so that more girls in Kenya can access the essential tools. He hoped to see in future when access to sanitary towels will be given the same status



Happy pupils in Nairobi after receiving free sanitary pads. Prime Minister Raila Odinga and his wife Ida Odinga after gracing the launch of a programme aimed at providing free sanitary pads to primary school girls. The programme is funded by the Government of Kenya in partnership with African Cotton Industries. Pictures: Henry Owino



as the provision of instructional materials and other resources in all schools.

The Minister for Education, Mutula Kilonzo said the introduction of the towels by the government will enable girls to remain in schools until they finish their education. He pointed out this will help address gender disparity experienced in most schools in the country.

"Despite the remarkable increases in access at both primary and secondary school, statistics show that over one million children are out of school in primary schools. Majority of these are in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) areas pockets of poverty and urban slums. A big proportion of that percentage is girls. Studies have shown that one of the reasons why girls miss classes or drop out altogether is maturation or the onset of puberty," Mutula explained.

Mutula regretted the money allocated for the good programme is not adequate to meet needs of the 2.6 million girls in primary and secondary schools. He appealed to Prime Minister, Raila Odinga to take up the matter personally so that the programme can be scaled up to the national level.

"The girl child is not a second hand citizen. She is entitled to equal treatment as others under Article 27(1) and (2) of the Constitution. Her best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning her under Article 53(2); she is entitled to free and compulsory basic education under Article 53(1) (b)," Mutula argued.

The Education Minister urged the State to take affirmative action programmes like the one launched to ensure that as a youth, the girl child gets access to relevant education and training under Article 55(1).

The reform programmes undertaken in the education sector by the government since 2003 by introducing free primary education (FPE), has helped achieve access, equality, relevance and quality in education.

"The reforms undertaken in the education sector during that period aim at accelerating achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and education for all (EFA) by 2015. Additionally it focuses on aligning the education sector to the new constitution and vision 2030," simplified Mutula.

The overall objective is providing education that is free and compulsory, affordable and accessible especially to families and children from low social-economic strata of society.

According Education Minister, the introduction of FPE in 2003, enrolment in primary school has risen from 5.9 million to 9.6 million pupils in 2012. Mutula observed that since the government introduced Free Day Secondary

Education in 2008, the enrolment has increased from 800,000 to 1.7 million students in 2012.

"As a result of the transition, the rate from primary to secondary has risen from 47 per cent in 2003 to 72.5% in 2012. This is above UNESCO benchmark of 70 per cent," the Minister applauded.

The Education Minister outlined other programmes in the Ministry which includes; Task Force on alignment of the Education Sector to the new constitution and vision 2030 mandated to review the current education system to ensure it in coincides with current global trends of education, the Constitution and vision 2030 in order to make the Kenyan education system globally competitive and market driven.

In addition to these, the Education Minister explicated more policy initiatives that Ministry is in the process of reviewing education sector with an aim of aligning them with the new constitution to make them implementable frameworks with the devolved governments.

For instance; gender in education policy which aims at eliminating gender disparities and achieving gender equity and equality in relation to access, retention, completion and transition in primary and secondary education by 2015.

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) policy whose intention is to mainstream ECDE into primary school cycle so that no child is left out of basic education. HIV and AIDS policy which recognizes that although the ministry has domesticated the National HIV and AIDS continues to be a threat to education achievements. An impact assessment on HIV and AIDS has been undertaken and the results once disseminated to stakeholders, will inform the policy review.

Child friendly schools are significant personal and social environment in the lives of its students. The ministry has ensured that the education environments are safe, healthy and protective and are endowed with trained teachers, adequate resources and appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for learning. Peace education policy which has been disseminated to the stakeholders is now ready for publication.

Mutula promised that his Ministry, in collaboration with other Ministries like Provincial Administration and National Security, Justice, National Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs and partners like UNICEF is in the process of rolling out a National Peace Education Campaign with the aim of using education as a means of positively influencing.

Meet Mercy, a woman who left her lucrative job to look after destitute

...By Henry Kahara

When Mercy Thuo, 55, built a home, she anticipated that life will be more comfortable as she will not be hustling for the rent, but this was never the case. Instead, the burden increased. At that time Mercy, a mother of three was a renowned cereal business woman in Nairobi.

"I used to buy maize in Kitale and then sell them to the Kenya Cereals and Produce Board and the local markets," says Mercy. For now that is history, she is today looking after the orphaned children in a centre she started 20 years ago.

"After relocating from Eastleigh, where I used to live, I settled in Mathare slums where I had built a residential house. But little did I knew that I will change that place to a rehabilitation centre," she says.

Although Mercy does not regret leaving her well paying business and starting this project, she has touched, changed and transformed many people's lives and admits that her life has not been easy.

"Since the time I started this project I have been forced to approach, who is who in this country begging for school fees and other needs for these children," she explains.

Currently, the Good Samaritan Children Home and Rehabilitation Centre has more than 400 children, some of whom are in university while others are less than a month old. According to Mercy, she had not thought of adopting a child leave a lone starting a children's home.

"I wanted to have a good life with my children, but God wanted it to be different because immediately I settled in my new home my third born son and last born started inviting his friends home," she says.

As a mother, Mercy could not chase them away, instead she warmly received them for saying it's not advisable to chase a destitute child out of your home all in the name of living a more luxurious life.

It is during this period when Mercy realised that some of his son's friends seemed to be undergoing hard times when she decided to enquire from them about their lives.

"I was amazed to learn that some of those children were orphans, some were under the care of their old grandmothers. This touched me very much when it further dawned to me that some even don't attend school," she narrates.

"I just decided to adopt three of them as I was in a position to cater for them, but at the same time the number increased gradually, so the burden continued being more and I saw it a need of opening a children's home," says Mama Mercy as she is widely known in the slums.

"At that time I learnt that many children were not attending schools due to school fees problem I also realised that some of the children's parents were drunkards. This had raised insecurity in this area as they used to violently steal goods from strangers," she says noting that now normalcy has returned.

From that time up to date Mercy recalls her tribulations, but all in all she praises God that she has made it despite the odds. I was the first person to offer Free Primary Education 10 years before President Kibaki emerged with FPE in Kenya," she says.

Before Kibaki's era, I had a difficult time as we had accommodated children whose parents could not afford the levies charged in public schools," she adds.

During the period, Mercy says, they used to rely on Form Four leavers, who were helping her to teach those who wanted to go to school. "We used to have three classes from nursery school to class two in the same class, three to five and six to eight," she says adding that the trend continued for long.

Today Mama Mercy says she is happy that she can see the fruits of her work as many of the children whom she brought up are working. "Some are graduates, while some are outside the country and they are doing fine," she asserts.

According to Mercy, children are a blessing and that is why she doesn't hesitate to accommodate one whenever she comes across such a case. My arms are always open ready to accommodate them because I believe that is accordance to God's plan," she reiterates.

Currently the youngest child in this Centre is barely a month old and she was left by her mother who is claimed to be insane immediately after she delivered in a hospital in Nairobi.

"His mother is said to have a mental problem and immediately she delivered she left. Nobody knows where she is now. Starehe OCPD ordered her to be brought here," says Mercy.

Women economic empowerment key to resolving Coastal problems

...By *Carolyn Oyugi*

Millicent Odhiambo is a woman with a vision, her vision is to see women from Coast Province and particularly Mombasa County economically empowered so that they can be actively involved in the day to day running of the county.

"I am saddened by the fact that women are physically strained, they do some of the most strenuous jobs and get very little out of it. I see women carrying a basket of coconuts, cassavas, mango brooms and walk with them throughout the day with a baby tied on their backs just to make KSh100 or less at the end of the day," observes Odhiambo.

She further explains that some of these women sell coconut from their husbands' coconut trees and so at the end of the day they have to give all the money to the men.

Odhiambo is from Nyanza which is otherwise known as bara (a common Coastal term for anywhere outside Coast Province). She is a Christian too in a land that is dominated by Muslims.

"The two challenges are there but the main one is the fact that I am a woman. In Mombasa we are in a culture whereby women are undermined by the indigenous community. They are there to be seen and not to be heard, the community views us as people who were brought to this world just to give birth, take care of the children and cook," she says.

However, Odhiambo points out that this is one of the reasons why Coast Province has been lagging behind in development.

In all this problems, she would like to use the Deputy Governor's office to solve these problems. However, she knows that she is engaging herself in a tricky business.

First the seat is not elective and second we still do not know who will win the Governor's seat so as to be nominated by him or her.

"The Governor's office is where decisions

will be made — financial decisions and allocation of funds to different projects — while at Deputy Governor's docket is where changes will be implemented and it is important that a woman occupies that seat so as to solve the women's problems," she says.

Odhiambo, a psychologist by profession has been getting support from the local women to run for Governorship but she believes that her mission is to bring change and it can still be done from the deputy's position.

"If you want to bring change somewhere you don't just go pressing so hard, that way you will build acrimony and they will form a wall to defend themselves. You must, therefore, work from within them; you must humble yourself so that when you blow out it is a blast. If I go straight for Governorship then the men will see us women as their enemies and yet we want to work together towards one goal," she says.

So, how is she going to work this out? You must be wondering. First they will have an elected governor, who they will have entered a Memorandum of Understanding with the locals that he will have to elect a female deputy and she, must be endorsed by the women of Mombasa.

Odhiambo believes that the position of women's poverty has been used by politicians to influence how they vote.

"For a very long time women have been bribed by simple things like lesos, a packet of maize flour and worse still salt. You cannot blame this woman because she is the one who carries the burden of the family. A woman cannot eat if her children are hungry, she lives for others," she observes.

Odhiambo also dreams of a better healthcare for women. "Our body (women) has extra organs, we undergo so many processes and hormonal changes. For that reason we frequent the hospitals more than men. We also go to hospitals when our children and husbands are sick. Research shows that women spend more time in health facilities than any other person," she



Millicent Odhiambo, a political aspirant in Mombasa County. Though she is a minority at the Coast by being a woman, a Christian and from Nyanza, she believes that leadership is not based on those three factors. Pictures: Carolyn Oyugi

notes adding that good healthcare facilities and services means peace of the mind for a woman.

Odhiambo sees Mombasa County as one that is very rich and can provide cheaper healthcare if they want to. "Even free healthcare just for women and children is possible and that is one thing that I will push for," she says with an assuring tone.

Odhiambo believes that if a woman is healthy, there is good education for her children and she has money in the bank, then the whole family is covered and that is what she wants to make a reality.

And it is not only in health where Odhiambo finds challenges. She also has a problem with the pre-unit schools that set the foundation for learning. She would like them to up their standards.

Children at the pre-unit school are still very close to the mothers, this is a fact she knows very well being a mother of five children herself.

She does not support the cliché that women are their own enemies. "We, women have been brought up in an environment where you are judged harshly for your mistakes and even for

your siblings mistakes. This does not change when you are married because if your children fail then they will always be compared to their mothers and when they succeed all the credit goes to the father even if he did not play any important role," she observes.

For this reason, Odhiambo explains, women have been oppressed and suppressed and the environment has moulded them that way. She is, however, optimistic that things will change for the better once they see the benefits of the new Constitution. When a woman sees a fellow woman coming out strongly and succeeding they feel threatened, or they view her as someone who is competing with their husband or the male figure in her life whom she has been brought up being submissive to all her life.

Odhiambo has been working hard in empowering young women and has also been working as a community representative in her Ward.

In her campaigns, majority of the people have been supporting her although some dwell on her widowhood which should not be used to measure her ability to deliver.

Lack of skills hinders women from expanding businesses

...By *Karani Kelvin*

Entrepreneurship can be exciting, especially when things go according to plan. It can be a little frustrating when the challenges as well as pressures from outside the business come in torrents. For Hellen Akinyi Otwane, 45, a mother of eight and resident of Amagoro in Busia County business has been a tricky venture. She has been doing business for about six years and not much seems to have changed.

"I still sell the same things, in the same amounts and at the same place," she says, a smile brightening her face, hiding for a moment the sadness in her voice.

Otwane has been selling vegetables and fruits and the wish to see her business grow has remained just that — a wish.

However, like most entrepreneurs Otwane has hopes there is light at the end of the tunnel. "When my husband died in 2004, life started being difficult. I had children to feed, clothe, house and take to school," she says.

"In 2006, I ventured into business with a capital of KSh150," she says. With this money, she bought her stock of tomatoes for KSh100 and onions for KSh50.

She also joined a merry-go-round with similar minded women. She was the first one to receive money. "I got KSh1,700 and put it all in the business," she points out. That was her first expansion of her business. She managed to increase the stock

and give her business the much needed boost.

From the proceeds of her business, she has managed to take care of her children, build a semi-permanent house, buy five goats and take the children to school, though with assistance from sponsors and relatives.

Although she has attended one seminar on how to manage a business, Otwane says she needs more information to help grow her grocery. She believes that although she left school in class seven, she can still learn one or two things about businesses to help realise her dreams.

Other than the lack of business know-how, Otwane believes that her parental responsibilities have also stopped her from expanding her business. "I spend almost all that I earn from this business to support my family," she explains.

Doing the same business without expanding for close to six years is such a long time. However, according to Wilhelmina Rodah Atyang', also a grocer in Amagoro, she has been doing the same business for much longer.

Atyang' started her business in the border town of Busia, Busia County in 1982. In 1990, she moved to Eldoret town where she set up shop until she left in 2007.

"I have been here since 2007, selling vegetables, fruits and charcoal," she says.

Atyang' has been doing the same business for about 30 years. According to her, only the towns and the people have changed, not her business or how much she has been earning from it.



Busy at work . Women tirelessly sell their wares to earn a living. Economic empowerment is key to women's participation in governance issues.

Atyang', a single mother of four children — two of whom have cleared high school and two who are still in secondary — she is happy with her business so far.

"Although I still struggle a lot, I have been able to pay school fees for my children and I continue to do so," she says.

Atyang' cites parental responsibility as well as lack of enough knowledge to grow her business as the major reasons why she has not increased her

stock significantly or moved to a bigger stall.

Despite being in business for about 30 years, Atyang' has not attended any training on business management. She would love to attend such trainings but she does not know how.

"I am always here selling my stock. How am I to find out where to get business information from?" she asks. With a broad smile on her face she adds: "If you hear of any such seminar, please come and tell me. I'll be right here."

Expectant mothers urged to visit clinics

...By Gilbert Ochieng

Expectant mothers in Busia County have been urged to visit ante-natal clinics at least four times prior to delivery in order to ensure that the babies are in good health.

A representative of UNICEF in

Kenya, Marcel Kanyankore, said majority of expectant mothers in Africa experience maternal problems while giving birth in the hands of the traditional birth attendants, most of who are less experienced.

She was speaking at Segero village, Nambale district, Busia County after inspecting the construction of

toilet facilities in the area, under a project known as "Open Defaecation Free (ODF) recently. Kanyankore urged area residents to desist from relieving themselves in the bush.

"Ensure that you have dug a pit latrine in your homesteads and utilise them fully in order to curb cases of diarrhoea in the area," advised Kan-

yankore, adding that they should observe high standards of hygiene especially by washing their hands with water and soap.

She lauded the area leaders and residents for ensuring that the project was successful, adding that UNICEF in collaboration with the government will fund more projects

in the district.

Kanyankore was accompanied with the UNICEF Regional Project Officer in charge of Western and Nyanza, Margaret Gwada, as well as Busia District Public Health Officer, Ojwang' Simiyu, and his Nambale counterpart Stephen Anjeche among others.

Health workers tasked in bid to prevent maternal deaths

...By Faith Muiruri

Kenyans can now seek legal redress for preventable maternal deaths.

The Chairman National Nurses Association of Kenya (NNAK), Luke KoDambo and Project Coordinator at the Reproductive Health Rights Alliance (RHRA) says that aggrieved parties can now seek justice in case they feel that their rights have been violated.

"If a mother comes to the hospital with pregnancy related complications and care is delayed, the trained health professional will be held accountable as outlined in the Constitution," he adds.

He says that access to maternal health care and reproductive health rights as enshrined in the Constitution must be fully safeguarded.

The Chairman notes that the rate of maternal deaths in the country are worrying with official figures indicating that approximately 8,000 women die every year due to complications arising from pregnancy and child bearing. Unsafe abortion accounts for 2,600 of these deaths both in public and private health institutions.

Dr Joachim Osur who is the Director of Africa Alliance Programs (Ipas) shares similar sentiments.

He says that health workers and the government must now brace themselves for more public interest litigations in the future if the current state of maternal health remains the same.

Dr. Osur says that health workers can no longer deny people contraceptives for cultural or religious reasons so long as it is within their professional scope of practice as provided by an Act of Parliament.

Rights

"It is no longer a privilege to avail sexual and reproductive health services, citizens can seek redress if they feel their right to health has been violated," he notes during the 17TH Midwives Scientific Conference held in Kakamega town.

The Constitution (Article 43(2)) is explicit and provides that "A person shall not be denied emergency medical treatment."

Further Article 26(4) of the Constitution provides that when "in the opinion of a trained health professional, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger or if permitted by any other written law".

Dr Osur says that failure to provide services that are legal will now attract penalties and calls on health workers to familiarize themselves with the law to avoid committing violations.

Dr Osur says that deaths from unsafe abortion are preventable and thus the need to face the problem and solve it.

"The spirit of the new constitution is that the 2600 deaths of women undergoing unsafe abortion need to be averted. Unless this touchy issue is addressed, the achievement of MDG 5 and other related goals of maternal health will remain elusive."

"Citizens must also be empowered and facilitated to demand for better health services. The article on emergency treatment falls in the Bill of Rights and Citizens can take action if leaders fail to," he adds.

Other factors that can impede the quality of



Health workers attend to a patient in hospital. Most women die every year due to complications arising from pregnancy and child bearing. Inset: Lucia Buyanza, a senior official with National Nurses Association of Kenya.

care include poor roads, shortage of staff, burn-out, long working hours and deep seated cultural beliefs surrounding pregnancy and childbirth especially in Coast and Western Kenya.

The Nurses Association is currently supporting, the Nursing Council of Kenya to align its codes and scope of practice within the constitutional provisions, like other health regulatory bodies.

Lucia Buyanza who is a senior official with NNAK at the same time says that the Ministry of Health is moving towards embracing the Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC) which she lays emphasis on preventive measures such as abstinence, family life education and provision of other safety options.

"We are not going to wait for women to come to hospitals with pregnancy related complications. Instead we will reach out to them at the village level and sensitize them on their reproductive health rights that include the right to decide freely and responsibly on the number, spacing and timing of their children and to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health," he adds.

Currently Post Abortion Care (PAC) is legal in government facilities but very expensive. It is estimated that the government spends Ksh 18 million annually, in Post Abortion Care given to women with complications arising from unsafe abortion by quacks or in an environ-

ment lacking minimal sanitary and medical standards.

Dr Osur however notes that although PAC is legal in government hospitals, most health facilities in the country do not have trained personnel to perform the operation.

Limitations

"Upto 50 percent of health facilities in the country lack the capacity to provide PAC, thus leaving room for quacks and herbalists to take charge," he laments.

Dr Osur says that in some instances women have to walk for long distances before they can access health facilities.

"This means that majority of these women die from complications that can effectively be treated in a health system that has adequate skilled personnel, a functioning referral system and can respond to obstetric emergencies when they occur," he affirms.

The doctor is however optimistic that once the County Governments become operational, such services will be managed at county level.

"This will help reduce sexual and reproductive health disparities across the country. We will have no reason any more to say Nairobi and Central provinces have political privileges," he intimates.

Dr Osur says that the government must guarantee access and quality health care to all



its citizens through adequate financing in line with the Abuja Declaration which requires that government commits 15 percent of its revenue to health to help address staff shortages and provide equipment and supplies in a safe health environment.

Reproductive Health Rights Alliance (RHRA) and IPAS are among organizations that seek to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity in Kenya. The two organizations are engaged in building nurses and midwives capacity on Constitutional provisions in the reproductive health care. The RHRA has enabled the service providers to uphold the reproductive health of women holistically.

Female journalism graduates shun newsrooms



...By Aziz Kindamba

A new trend is emerging in the Tanzania media fraternity with more women enrolling in media training institutions than their male counterparts. At the moment, the number of female students in journalism schools in Tanzania accounts for more than 60 percent of all the students.

The increase in female enrollment can partly be attributed to the increase in media training schools in the country.

Currently, there are universities offering under-graduate and post graduate courses in journalism, mass communication, public relation and advertising. These are the schools of journalism and mass communication of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tumaini University and Saint Augustine University in Tanzania.

Besides the three universities there are a number of colleges which offer certificates, advanced certificates and diplomas in journalism related disciplines.

These include: Time school of journalism, Dar es Salaam school, Dar es Salaam School of Journalism, Royal College of Tanzania, Media and value Training institute, Arusha journalism Training College of Tanzania and Morogoro School of Journalism and others. In almost all these media training institutions the number of female students surpasses by far the number of male students.

For example, of the entire population of first, second and third year students at the Tumaini University and Dar es Salaam University, 50 percent are female.

Even with this tremendous increase in the number of female students in schools of journalism, there are very few in the newsrooms. There seems to be a serious disconnect between the universities and the newsrooms. Or there is something in the newsroom that is making female graduates avoid them and instead opt for information officers positions in government or private companies.

In Tanzania, on average, there are 24 male senior reporters per organization compared to only six women in the same position. Globally, the trend is equally worrying: less than 20 percent of all professional journalists are females.

Some of the reasons that have been cited

Female journalists attend a media workshop in Nairobi Kenya. Some of them feel that the industry was gender insensitive and impedes their prospects of advancing to managerial level. Pictures: Carolyn Oyugi

for women refusing to go into the newsroom are: low remuneration, poor working conditions, long working hours, low job satisfaction, and lack of professional and career development.

Working in newsroom means working until late hours and unlike men, female journalists have to balance family commitments and job demands. This is a challenge which leaves most female journalists with one option that is to go for less demanding jobs or that do not require to work late.

Marriage is another reason most female journalist are quitting jobs in Tanzanian media. After getting married, their spouses cannot allow them to work very late. In one of the studies in Tanzania, 43 percent of the female journalists cited male chauvinism in newsrooms as one of the reasons why they shun active journalism.

Others feel that working in an industry dominated by men dims their prospects of advancing to the top managerial level.

According to Catherine Chima, a lecturer at the Tumaini University, Dar es Salaam campus, some of the lecturers are to blame for fewer numbers of women in the newsroom.

"I remember my first day in mass communication class when I was doing my undergraduate course, there was this lecturer who upon learning that I was a teacher wondered how on earth I could quit the teaching profession and join journalism,"

"I remember my first day in mass communication class when I was doing my undergraduate course, there was this lecturer who upon learning that I was a teacher wondered how on earth I could quit the teaching profession and join journalism."
— Catherine Chima

she says.

She says such attitude will easily turn off students in a journalism class. However, it is worth noting that not all female students who join journalism and mass communication courses have a passion for the profession.

Some join the courses because they have failed to enroll in other courses, or simply because they do not qualify in other courses.

Studies have proven this to be right. Forty six percent of female journalism students surveyed in Tanzania reported that they joined journalism training institutions because they wanted to acquire some qualifications for further studies.

While 38 percent said, as much as they wished to join other courses, they failed to make it because they could not meet entry requirements.

Thirty five percent of respondents said some students lost interest in journalism when they first went for internship in newsrooms - which included chasing stories on the streets, working late and the way some editors treated their stories. It made them hate journalism.

Exploitation by publishers was also cited as another reason why female journalists shun newsrooms. About 22 percent of respondents said that journalism is a demanding and risky profession that entails working late and sometimes handling dangerous stories, which can endanger one's life.

Discrimination in terms of remuneration was also cited as another problem. Female journalists are paid less than their male counterparts under the pretext that they cannot handle serious stories.

All these factors combine to discourage female graduates from schools of journalism going into the media. It is important to note, however, that the legal framework in Tanzania calls for gender balance in all spheres and organizations.

It is therefore incumbent upon owners of media houses and media managers to put in place a conducive environment that attracts female journalists. Also, the female journalists need to be mentored on how to survive in a newsroom environment.

Men elbow out women in media

...By Goodluck Hongo

Even as gender advocates in Tanzania push for the increased representation of women in public decision making positions, little focus is being given to the private sector, where gender issues are getting a raw deal.

One of the industries in the private sector that continues to suppress the views of women on topical issues that affect them and the country is the media. Studies on how media covers gender issues indicate that the biggest beneficiary of the space and airtime in the media are men.

The many ills that women encounter, including gender based violence, rape, property disinheritance, and verbal insults, are rarely covered by the media. The Gender and Media Progress Study, 2010 by Gender Links shows a paltry 3 percent of the stories in the media are on gender based violence. Women suffering in conflict situations and disempowerment within the media houses are also not focused on.

Yet, the media continues to hear men's views, even on issues that women are better placed to articulate. The GMPS study found that 79 percent of the news sources in the media were men compared to 21 percent female. One in every four people interviewed in the Tanzanian media is a woman, making them the most voiceless of persons. Their views are not included in the news agenda.

The study further found that men are four times more likely, seven times more likely, and almost four times more likely to be used as sources in the Tanzanian print, radio, and television respectively than women sources.

Women voices start to appear in the media as they grow old. More than half of those whose views were expressed in the Tanzania media were men aged between 50 and 64 years, while women views were visible in the news when in the ages 35 to 49 years, the study found.

When young, media seems not to consider women as having valuable views, only using them as images. Tanzanian women aged 20-34 years and 35-49 years are more than twice as likely to have their images appear in the newspapers than images of men in the same age bracket.

This does not mean that there are no women who can be interviewed by the media. In Parliament, for instance, while the Speaker of Parliament is a woman, Ms. Anne Makinda, those who are sourced for views in the same parliament are men.

According to Gladness Munuo, the GEMSAT Coordinator, the majority of the journalists source for information from men either due to ignorance or stereotypes, especially when they think that good views only come from men.

Munuo said the media need to know that they are required by the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and Tanzania Media Council Gender Code of Ethics to give equal space and airtime to both genders.

The sad thing is that many of the media and journalists have no idea about the contents of these two important documents.

Participants at a recent training meeting for journalists held in Dar es Salaam said there is need to have a structured capacity building programme on gender issues for journalists. They said this will increase the number of women sources in the media.

But even as the journalists called for increased training for media personnel, they also asked the civil society to train and encourage women to be ready for the media to interview them.

The majority of women, they said, shy away from the media when they are approached to offer their views on topical issues and ongoing debate in the country.

"Sometimes these very women will refuse to be interviewed and ask you to talk to their male counterparts. Now what is a journalist expected to do in such a circumstance," posed a male journalist.

One of the problems raised on the minimal representation of women in media is the lack of skills among journalists on how to deal with women sources. While the women sources take time before they are comfortable to be interviewed, journalists do not give them that space.

The speed and lack of assurance to the sources that all shall be well, has made many of them view media as something that will destroy and not built them.

Munuo says training of journalists on gender issues and imparting them with skills on how to handle women sources is critical if voices of women are to increase in the media.

Bangladesh scores on girls' schooling

...By Naimul Haq

Bangladesh continues to score good grades in achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of gender parity in education by 2015, with the trend of more girls than boys attending primary school accelerating this year.

Early estimates for the accounting year that ended March show an enrolment ratio of 52:48 favouring girls, which is consistent with the trend since 2010 when girls overtook boys in primary school enrolment.

"Eliminating gender disparity in primary education by Bangladesh, recognised worldwide, is the result of strong political commitment," A.K.M. Abdul Awal Mojumder, secretary, ministry of primary and mass education (MoPME), told IPS.

Hiring female teachers, involving non-government organisations (NGOs), and paying out cash subsidies are among interventions that helped turn around the situation of a decade ago when schooling for girls was unthinkable in parts of Bangladesh because of social and religious barriers.

Since 2000, the MoPME has been implementing a policy of hiring women as primary school teachers, and currently 90 per cent of the 182,000 teachers in Bangladesh's 37,500 primary schools are female. Also, 95 per cent of school management committees are headed by women.

"Classrooms run by female teachers created an environment for girls to attend schools," said Aziz-ur-Rashid, headmaster of a primary school in Niphamari district. "The retention rate increased remarkably as a result."

The primary education stipend project (PESP), funded by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Norwegian government, was aimed at increasing enrolment, attendance, retention and performance of primary school-aged children from poor families.

PESP money is deposited directly into individual bank accounts every six months. The monthly stipend varies from Taka 25 (three cents) for a student of class VI to Taka 60 (seven cents) for a class X student.

In addition, every candidate appearing for secondary school certificate final examination is entitled to six dollars to cover examination fees.

Wherever state-run institutions could not take up the challenge of enrolling and retaining girls in school, NGOs stepped in to help the children in the 'dropped out, left out or missed out' categories, especially in the remote, hilly or wetland areas.

"There is tremendous enthusiasm among rural children to attend classes, some riding boats to attend classes," says Humayun Kabir Selim, director of Palli Bikash Kendra, an NGO that operates 10 primary schools in the vast wetland areas of Mithamoin in Kishoreganj district.

With NGOs roped in, the net enrolment rate increased from 73.3 per cent in 1992 to 94 per cent by 2011. Dropout rates, one of the main concerns, also declined from 38 per cent in 1994 to about 30 per cent in 2011.

NGO-run schools have good instructional material, trained and motivated teachers and, most importantly, the flexibility to conform to the needs and capacities of the community. NGO-run primary schools often operate out of one-room houses made available by grateful local communities.

"The flexibility makes for better attendance as children do not have to walk distances as is the case with many state-run primary schools," said Waheeda Mahmud, a primary school teacher with a local NGO in the Nachol sub-district in Chaipainawabganj district.

"Parents feel safer when the school is located around the corner. They also consider female teachers to have more patience," said Samsun Nahar Lina, who heads 'Shakkor' an NGO that runs several free primary schools in Rang-



A girl in Bangladesh displays a placard to affirm ongoing efforts to increase enrolment rates for the girl child. The campaign is already bearing fruit and more girls have enrolled in school this year than boys. Picture: IPS

pur district, 370 km from Dhaka.

Ten-year-old Aireen Akhtar was 'left out' until two years ago when determined advocacy persuaded her parents to send her to a nearby NGO-run school in the Charpara village of Mithamoin sub-district, about 130 km from Dhaka.

Says Aireen, a shy but confident pupil in a class of 12 girls and seven boys: "Every day we learn something new. It's fun. There is no fixed timetable for classes and there is no homework."

There are several non-formal primary education (NFPE) systems in Bangladesh but the one devised by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), reputed to be the world's biggest NGO, is popular with people involved in primary education.

BRAC began implementing NFPE in 1985 with its one-classroom schools and selecting and training female teachers from the local community.

Shafiqul Islam, head of BRAC's education programme, told IPS: "A lot of children come from poor rural families and are into income-generating activities. The rigidity and inflexibility of the formal education system had put education beyond the reach of these children... flexible school timings are key to our success."

Since 1985, BRAC has set up 38,000 non-formal schools in 470 sub-districts. Over 1.2 million children (70 per cent of them girls) attend BRAC schools, forming the largest private school chain in the world.

Rasheda K. Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), told IPS: "Bangladesh's achievements in promoting gender equality are largely due to initiatives launched by NGOs which believe in flexible academic calendars."

CAMPE, a coalition of more than 1,300 NGOs, works to achieve MDG

2 and MDG 3 by implementing quality education through advocacy and capacity building. These are part of the eight goals defined by the United Nations to be met by 2015.

While MDG 2 demands that all children complete a full course of primary schooling by that year, MDG 3 calls for the elimination of gender disparity in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

There are now 16,539,363 students studying in 81,000 primary schools in Bangladesh, including those run by NGOs, communities and madrassas (religious schools). Stefan Priesner, country director of United Nations Development Programme in Bangladesh, told IPS: "In general, progress has been sound. Indeed, on many MDGs, including expanding education, Bangladesh has either exceeded or is well on track to achieve the goal by 2015."

Courtesy of IPS

Sexual abuse keeps girls out of school

...By Catherine Wilson

Sexual harassment of school-going girls is one factor that may prevent Papua New Guinea from achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of eliminating gender disparity in education by 2015.

Papua New Guinea's new free education policy has dramatically increased school enrolment, and a gross enrolment rate of 80 per cent is within reach by 2015. However, the third of the United Nations' eight MDGs that pertains to girls' education remains elusive. While Papua New Guinea's constitution promotes equal participation by men and women in national development, political, cultural, social and infrastructural factors inhibit retention of girls within the school system, reflecting a wider lack of women in the formal workforce, governance and decision-making roles.

The United Nations Development Programme rates the nation at 153 out of 187 countries, with a gender inequality index of 0.674. The education department reports the average educational attainment of girls is grade 10 and, for boys, grade 12, the final year of secondary school.

However, the nation's cultural and social diversity means there is geographical variance.

In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, where matrilineal societies are prevalent, there are 16,821 male and 16,120 female students in schools. In the Eastern Highlands Province, the literacy rate for males is 51 per cent compared to 36.5 per cent for females.

There were 7,127 male and 5,872 female students in primary level grade three in 2009. In grade 12, the number of female students, 180, was less than half the male enrolment of 494. In the highlands, where most people practice subsistence agriculture and the average cash income is low, girls can be particularly disadvantaged, especially if there are no local schools. "The (poor) state of school infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is a significant hindrance to the achievement of equitable education outcomes," said Arnold Kukari, leader of the universal basic education research programme at the National Research Institute.

According to Betty Hinamunimo, field officer with Care International, a non-government organisation (NGO) which works in partnership with the education department, factors impeding girls' education included "distance and cultural and social barriers, such as the fear families have in sending girls to urban centres where their safety is not guaranteed".

Girls in Papua New Guinea are at high risk of domestic and sexual violence, sexual harassment in schools, commercial exploitation and HIV, which pose serious threats to their health and education.

Ume Wainetti at the Family Sexual Violence Action Centre (FSVAC) said: "When FSVAC conducted the study on violence against children in 2005, young girls in rural schools said they get harassed by teachers and by male students, especially when they are going to school or going home."

Wainetti said many of the young girls interviewed by FSVAC, an NGO

based in the capital of Port Moresby, were already mothers.

Cultural and social barriers to education include the burden placed on girls of family care, domestic responsibilities and customary marriage, which can occur from 12 years. The International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) estimates that a third of girls in the developing world are married before 18 years and begin child-bearing before 20 years.

The education department's gender equity strategic plan (2009-2014) stresses the need to develop gender mainstreaming activities in schools and train all staff in gender sensitisation and sexual violence awareness. Philip Afuti, president of the Papua New Guinea teachers' association, Eastern Highlands, and head teacher of North Goroka Primary School, is committed to gender equality. Eighty per cent of teachers are female, while the school has 630 male and 523 female students.

"We want to see the girls have an equal opportunity as boys in the education system," Afuti declared. "They should be able to build this nation in partnership. We want to see that. PNG will only develop when both males and females are educated."

This year, the national government rolled out a free and subsidised education policy, which has impacted on female enrolment. Students attending elementary prep to grade 10 at secondary school do not have to pay tuition fees while those in grades 11 and 12 pay only 25 per cent of fees.

"We have increased the numbers of females enrolling," Afuti verified. "Some who left a few years ago have



also come back."

But there is a limit to the expansion of the education system.

"The government has taken a bold step to abolish school fees at the basic education level, thus addressing a critical access barrier, enabling more children to be enrolled and complete a full cycle of education," Kukari explained. He added: "However at this juncture, the education system does not have the absorptive capacity to accommodate all children wanting to enrol and to provide a sufficient number of teachers to ensure that children are provided with a quality education as well."

There are also inadequate mechanisms of support for school-going girls suffering from sexual abuse. "If there are avenues for redress to such offences, these are not made known to students and parents," Wainetti said.

"It is unfortunate that many teachers will not do anything about these abuses until the parents of the girl or

boy turn up at the school to beat up the students who have been harassing their child," Wainetti said.

The ICRW advocates that educated girls 'who become healthy, productive and empowered adults are a force for positive social, economic and political change.

Betty Hinamunimo agrees that, in rural communities, women working as literacy teachers are being valued more in the community and respected, and as role models they are contributing to changes in community attitudes and greater support for educating daughters. "There is no doubt that Papua New Guinea's health, economic and social indicators will improve if there are more educated and professionally qualified women," Kukari concurred. "They would make a very big difference in government, business, the private sector, public service and many other areas."

Courtesy of IPS

Tuvuke Initiative commits to unite communities ahead of polls

...By HENRY OWINO

The post elections violence of 2007-2008 caught many Kenyans unawares. While competing factions expressed interest for their political party, no one was prepared for the violence that saw hundreds killed and thousands displaced from their homes.

As the country prepares for the next general elections, many Kenyans would not like to see a repeat of 2007. This is why civil society organizations have come together to advocate for peace through the Tuvuke -Initiative.

The Tuvuke -Initiative has committed itself to cultivate a culture of unity and tranquillity during these political campaigns and after the forthcoming general elections in Kenya.

The Initiative's major concern is based on peace and fair electoral process in Kenya. This is a country-wide project with a special focus on areas prone to violence and with poor women's participation in electoral process.

Tuvuke Initiative is being spearheaded by 17 civil society organisations and works with other key stakeholders that include the public, women, voters, Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, political parties, law enforcement agencies and county governance structures.

The objective is to enhance peaceful elections and the culture of tolerance through the strengthening and capacity building of networks at community, regional national and the global level.

With the slogan K-PEACE, the overall objective is to promote peaceful, fair and democratic electoral process in Kenya by fostering a culture of peace, entrenching broad political participation and advocating for acceptance and diversity.

Speaking during the official launch of the Tuvuke- Initiative at a hotel in Nairobi, Chief Justice Dr Willy Mutunga asked Kenyans to take individual and collectively responsibility in promoting peace before and after the elections.

"The campaign is an alternative strategy of preaching peace in hot-spot areas and should not be taken for granted," noted Mutunga.

The Chief Justice regretted the past, especially the sad moments of Kenya's history when courts failed to uphold the rule of law to defend the rights of Kenyans.

"This is the main reason we fought for a new Constitution and now we are reforming the Judiciary and we must succeed in creating an institution of justice that can secure our democracy and fulfil its rich promise," noted Mutunga.

The Chief Justice urged Kenyans to stop bribing judges as he acknowledged the practice was rife within the Judiciary.

According to Jennifer Riria, chairperson Tuvuke-Initiative in attempting to achieve the objectives, the Initiative will not work in isolation.

Riria promised to engage the government, the Constitution Implementation Commission (CIC), the National Cohesion and Integration (NCIC), the Independent Electoral Boundaries



Attentive: participants keenly following the speakers during the launch of the Tuvuke Initiative in Nairobi. Below: Chief Justice Willy Mutunga during the launch. Pictures: KenyanWoman Correspondent

Commission (IEBC) and other constitutional Commissions in the process.

"We will not leave out international partners, civil society organisations, faith based organisations and the private sector in the realisation of the Initiative's mission," she noted.

Riria anticipated obstacles ahead of the Initiative's programmes but hoped to challenge patriarchy and its linkages to elections and leadership through civic education and male involvement in support of women.

"Tuvuke is a call on Kenyans to take individual and collective responsibility in ensuring that the nation makes a peaceful transition during the forthcoming elections," Riria emphasised.

She elaborated that Tuvuke-Initiative will address land rights and past injustices by challenging the link between land and electoral process, increase knowledge among Kenyans about their rights as voters and encourage youth to register and vote, create platforms for positive transformation of youth by encouraging youth to harness new strategies, tools and platforms in the promotion of national values.

In addition, Riria pointed out that the initiative will ensure that women's gains are safeguarded within the Constitution by promoting participation and involvement of women as voters and leaders, engage faith-based organisations to mobilize constituencies for overall active participation in the electoral process and address stereotypes, change perceptions about communities as well as entrench peace and na-

tional values.

The current Constitution provides an important opportunity for women to be actively engaged in leadership at the county and national levels. Women are key to social transformation and Tuvuke has promised to encourage women to join political parties of their choice, register as voters and vote for leaders who will protect their rights.

Discrimination against women stems from practices in the communities and not necessarily the State. It is, therefore, fundamental that everyone respects women's rights and the State ensures that the constitutional rights of women are not violated.

It is against this backdrop that Tuvuke undertakes public education on the rights of women to every county to create awareness. Because of the patriarchal nature of the society, it is imperative that men are also involved in the articulation of the women's rights.

Tuvuke are now engaging men countrywide in dialogue so that they become advocates for the rights of women to participate fully in the forthcoming electoral process.

"Our message is simple, Tuvuke! A better Kenya for all. Through inclusive politics and active engagement of citizens, we can all contribute in creating a nation where all Kenyans participate fully in determining the nation's destiny," stated Riria.

"We are calling on Kenyans to articulate the slogan NIMEJIANDIKISHA...philosophy towards free, fair and peaceful elections by becoming



active participants in the process. This is not an empty slogan, it is a conscious and deep-rooted statement of commitment to the transformation of our nation," observed Riria.

The Initiative is out to equip Kenyans with skills so that they can become agents of social change by enhancing justice and peace and increasing inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance. By challenging clanism, ethnicism and religious bigotry, it contributes in the development of an inclusive nation.

Riria reiterated that by making a peaceful transition in the next general elections, Kenya will become a better nation for all citizens irrespective of their ethnic base, geographical location or socio-economic status.

However, she cautioned that a better Kenya for all will only become possible if every individual and the citizens collectively take responsibility for the country

"NIMEJIANDIKISHA . . . because we cannot afford to miss the opportunity of making a democratic transition and regaining our dignity as guaranteed by the Constitution," explained Riria.

Her sentiments were echoed by Prof Kimani Njogu, a member of the Tuvuke-Initiative Secretariat who said; "We want to ensure that the campaign sustains progress with constitutional reforms and promotes new democracy in Kenya."

Kimani declared that the Initiative in a few months would have a warning system for those who go against peace for the country. "Once the campaign hits the ground, warning posters will be placed in various places," said Kimani.

He noted that this will reinforce proactive activities to freeze any pre-planned or spontaneous violence as a reaction to the electoral process or the elections results.



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E-mail: info@awcfs.org
www.awcfs.org

Executive Director: Rosemary Okello

Editorial Director: Arthur Okwemba

Managing Editor: Jane Godia

Sub-Editors: Duncan Mboyah and Faith Muiruri

Contributors: Carolyne Oyugi, Faith Muiruri, Kabia Matega, Ryan Mathenge, Mark Landler, John H.Cushman Jr., Noor Shija, Robert Wanjala, Aggrey Buchunju, Henry Owino, Henry Kahara, Henry Neondo, Sally Nyakanyanga, Steve Mucheru, Karani Kelvin, GILBERT OCHIENG, Aziz Kindamba, Naimul Haq, Catherine Wilson.

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