

# KENYAN WOMAN



Advocating for the rights of women



## Women issue ultimatum The time is now, and we are not turning back

...By Jane Godia

The Kenyan Parliament is once again gambling with the woman's right and is showing intent to take away what rightfully belongs to her. This has become clear as debate on the gender parity rule continues unabated.

According to the Constitution, the affirmative action clause requires that not more than two thirds of the same gender should take up elective and appointive positions in public offices.

### Dominance

Men have since independence had the upper hand, particularly in the political arena. The culture of men taking up all political positions was erased by this new law but the women are yet to have it easy with their male counterparts searching for loopholes to water down or even completely disregard the affirmative action rule.

Next year, Kenya will be 50 years old since it took over the reins of power from the colonial government. Would it not have been a good time to celebrate the Golden Jubilee with allowing women to take what rightfully belongs to them without politicising the whole process by saying that there are no women to take up elective positions within the new political dispensation.

While women were denied the opportunity to go to school so that their brothers would get the education, this same women have taken advantage of education avenues that have opened up and many have gone to school through ngumbaru (adult classes) and the parallel classes that are being offered by universities.

### Turnaround

The women who have not been allowed to be in politics because it is a man's game are now saying that it is their turn to lead. They have come out guns blazing and have sent a warning to the leadership of this country,



Sotik MP Dr Joyce Laboso joins women from Coast province in a demonstration to show solidarity for the push in the implementation of the gender rule.

that "if we do not get what rightfully belongs to us then we will change how politics is run".

Speaking in Mombasa during a grassroots forum called to push for the legislation of the two thirds principle, women under the umbrella of Sauti ya Wanawake from all over the Coast Province said:

Wakati ni sasa (this is time).

According to Tennyson Williams, Country Director Action Aid Kenya, there are a lot of qualified and educated women in Kenya. "As long as women come out to vie we will support promotion of women's leadership. We will support them to take over leadership which is now being challenged by men."

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## EDITORIAL

# Which way for women in 2013?

...By Odhiambo Orlele

All is not well in as far as women aspirants and voters are concerned. The electoral process is largely devoid of measures to protect them from the murky political arena which has in the past denied them an opportunity to ascend to leadership.

Indeed, feedback from a cross section of women across the country in

the 47 counties reveals that they are getting more confused by the day as the clock ticks closer to the March 3, 2013 General Elections.

### Delay

The apparent indecisiveness by the courts to resolve the two thirds gender principle is causing more anxiety by day and frustrating women aspirants and their supporters as we edge closer to the grueling party nominations and

campaigns. It is sad that five months to the polls, the matter filed by the civil society groups a year ago is still pending before the High Court.

The subject of the lawsuit is interpretation of Article 27 (3) of the Constitution which states inter alia that: "Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic and cultural and social spheres. 27 (8)...The State shall take legislative

and other measures to implement the principle that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender."

### Position

This matter has also been exhaustively discussed and debated at public forums by Parliament and by the Cabinet chaired by President Kibaki.

Meanwhile, the women rights groups have stuck to their guns and are

not ready to budge as they demand for their constitutional rights so that they could be more involved in the decision-making processes of this country at all levels.

Yet this is not supposed to be the case, thanks to the women's gains in the new Constitution. These include affirmative action principle and the two thirds rule in all elective posts that will

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# Activist from Nepal receives Wangari Maathai Award

...By a Correspondent

The first-ever Wangari Maathai Award has been given to a forestry activist from Nepal to recognize his efforts to promote community forest management. The ceremony took place at the Committee on Forestry (COFO), at FAO headquarters in Rome.

## Initiators

The Wangari Maathai Awards were established by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), of which FAO is an active member to recognise the efforts to improve and sustain forests and to honour the memory of Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan environmentalist and the first African woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

The top prize was awarded to dedicated activist Narayan Kaji Shrestha from Nepal for his outstanding contribution in promoting community forest issues in Nepal for several decades at international forestry events.

"Narayan Kaji Shrestha's work captures the spirit of Wangari Maathai," said FAO Assistant Director-General for Forestry, Eduardo Rojas-Briales. "His vision, courage, commitment, intelligence

and praxis is recognized through this award."

Narayan Kaji Shrestha guided early attempts to create a more participatory approach to community decision-making, reaching out to women and low-caste villagers and initiating the country's first community forestry group. More than one-quarter of Nepal's forests are now protected by community forestry groups. The prize includes a cash award of \$20,000.

This year the jury has decided to give a special Honourable Mention prize of \$2,000 to Kurshida Begum of Bangladesh for her exceptional efforts in helping women of her village form a community patrol group alongside forest department guards to protect the forests and biodiversity of the Tenkaf Wildlife Sanctuary from illegal logging and poaching.

## Ceremony

The Awards ceremony was attended by Rosemary Wanjiru Maina, niece of Wangari Maathai, and Professor Stephen Kiama Gitahi of the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies.

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests is comprised of 14 international organisations working together to promote forest management, conservation and sustainable development.



Nobel Peace Laureate, the late Prof Wangari Maathai. Environmentalist Narayan Shrestha from Nepal received this year's 'The Wangari Maathai Award' established by The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) for his contribution in promoting community forests.

# Why girl child is not competing favourably

...By Mweri Mayenge

As the day breaks, they are already on the road towards Kilifi town where they expect to get a livelihood. On their heads rest a bunch of firewood which is replaced with vegetables during the rainy season.

This typifies the life of young girls below 15 years from poverty stricken homes in Kilifi County who have been forced to drop out of school to augment their family's income.

However, as the young girls toil for the families, their fathers usually spend their time drinking local brews in drinking joints popularly known as Mangwe in the Mijikenda language.

## Action

According to Florence Sitawa, District Officer Bahari Division, the future of the division is at stake if the trend is not reversed.

"As stakeholders we need to come up with ways to make sure that both parents play the key role in providing for the family and not vice versa," says Sitawa.

She notes that the change of roles between parents and their children is deplorable and likely to have negative ramifications on the future generations.

"We cannot have children loitering around urban centres to sell firewood or vegetable while their fathers enjoy beer in the neighbourhood," she warns.

Sitawa says that the issue is getting out of hand and immediate measures need to be taken to stop the habit.

"We need to collectively take responsibility as a community and say no to cases of child labour. We cannot engage our children in such activities at the ex-

pense of their education," she warns.

According to the Kilifi District International Labour Organisation Coordinator Paul Mwandikwa, two in every 10 children drop out of school every year to look for casual jobs to help support their family.

"As the young girls move around looking for casual jobs as house helps their male counterparts normally run to the coral block quarries where they cut blocks, harvest sand as others are hired as loaders in the trucks that transport the blocks," explains Mwandikwa.

However, he notes that the trend is slowly decreasing after various players especially non-governmental organisations came into play and advocated for the rights of children.

He pointed that the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) managed to rescue over 2,500 children from child labour in Kilifi District through the ILO/IPEC-SNAP project.

## Poverty

Mwandikwa attributed the problem of child labour to poverty that has taken root in the district.

"The district is one of the poorest in the country hence child labour has taken root especially in the towns that border the sea shore," he says.

He reveals that prostitution too is rampant in the area since its one way that the young girls use to earn a living and also provide for their families.

"The other worst form is the commercial sex exploitation of children where young girls engage in commercial sex with older men. These forms are commonly found along the towns close

to the beaches," he says.

Unfortunately most of the young girls are exposed to prostitution by women who act like brokers.

In most cases, the women take the young girls to sleep with older men especially tourists and once the women are paid they give the young girls a small amount.

However, when the SNAP project was introduced two years ago, the trend has slowly diminished after rescuing 940 girls from early marriages and 900 girls from commercial sex exploitation.

## Rationale

"We normally rescue and take them back to school to gain skills. We also train their parents on entrepreneurship and also make sure they get funding so that the children do not find themselves in the same situation again when they get home," says Mwandikwa.

Moving the goal posts, an organisation that has been advocating for children's rights through football has taken a lead role in rescue and advocating for the rights of the girl child.

According to the project coordinator Cocky Van Dam, about a quarter of the children in the district are exposed to child labour either in the home or outside the home.

"Some children in the remote areas work in farms so that they can get some money to buy foodstuff and books. Others are prompted to drop out of school either to get married at a tender age or go to big towns to do casual jobs and yet they are not orphans," she says.

She notes that her organisation sends young girls back to school and makes sure they are mentored to complete their education successfully.

# Which way for women in 2013?

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be contested for.

It is a fact that the majority of Kenya's 40 million people are living in the rural areas where the illiteracy levels are alarming, especially among women. These are the same people who will be expected to scroll through the long list of men and women candidates and in one of the 50 plus political parties to pick their leaders for the next five years.

## Opportunity

The new coveted seats will be that of the Senator, the Governor and the women's representative. It is only the latter that will be reserved for women candidates in all the 47 counties, but the voting will be universal suffrage system for the three, in addition to the President, MP and ward representative (new name for councilors).

It is unfortunate that barely two months to the party nominations, only a handful of women have declared their interest in the Senate and Gubernatorial seats in most of the 47 Counties. Their major handicap is negative cultural beliefs by their respective communities; lack of finances, resources and male godfathers to support their candidature.

In Uasin Gishu County, an aspirant for the Governor's seat told a public forum in Eldoret recently that their community did not allow women to stand before men to address them. So how are they expected to campaign for themselves and/or their fellow women who wanted to view for bigger seats?

He cited a proverbial Kalenjin saying: "The tallest mango tree is the one with the most number of

trees around its roots!"

The case for Pokot women is even worse; their high level of illiteracy and ignorance is being exploited by men who are telling them that their culture would not allow them to vie for elective posts simply because of their gender. So far none has dared to declare interest for the seat of MP, Governor and/or Senator so far!

Said the participant: "We Pokot women are not allowed to take leadership positions. Even during the polls, our men carry our IDs and voters' cards and tell us who to vote for. If we speak our minds in the evenings it is 'ni kibiko (canning)'. But we have confidence that with civic education from organizations like AWC Feature Service we will succeed."

## Leadership

In other words, politics is not for the faint hearted and women aspirants for the various seats must be ready to plunge into politics knowing the full consequences. These are mudslinging, verbal, psychological and sexual abuse, media bias, male chauvinism among others.

The days of a free ride to the august House are now a thing of the past and are now etched in the dustbin of history. That was the era when women had to be friends and/or relatives of the political elite and the party leader in order to get direct nomination to Parliament without spending a cent or facing the electorate in the campaigns and the ballot box.

Leadership does not come easy and any women thinking that it will come on a silver platter are misled.



# Pauline Akai Lokuruka

## Destined for early forced marriage, death of livestock saved her schooling

...By Duncan Mboyah

**B**orn to a church employee 53 years ago, Pauline Akai Lokuruka would not have attended school and achieved her status were it not for the death of her parent's livestock.

The priest then at Baragoi Catholic Mission had asked Lokuruka's father to enrol her in school but he adamantly refused, forcing him to quit his job and move with his family to Sukta valley. However, things would not go right here and he soon lost all his animals.

"My father lost all his livestock to a strange disease and was forced to go back and work at the mission for fear that his children could die of hunger," says Lokuruka, a specialist on youth and women empowerment and development.

According to her father girls should be married at tender age to fetch many livestock for the family, a tradition that has evolved over centuries among the Turkana community and other pastoralist communities.

### Pressure

Father Peter Talone piled pressure that Lokuruka should attend school together with some of her agemates who had already been enrolled.

Her father gave in and the priest ensured that she was admitted at Baragoi Boarding Primary School in 1966.

Growing up as a young girl and studying under the hardships in Northern Kenya, Lokuruka vowed to one day return and help emancipate the people in the area by helping solve some of the problems they were facing.

With the devolved government, courtesy of the Kenya's new constitution that has created various elective positions, Lokuruka is set to contest the seat of woman representative during the coming general elections.

### Mission

"My objective when elected is to help empower women and also ensure that all Turkana children get education," says Lokuruka, a deputy director Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies, Egerton University.

For Lokuruka, poverty in Turkana has affected growth and development of children, denying them an opportunity of competing favourably with those from other parts of the country.

She observes that culture is partly to blame as many young girls of school going age are married off by their parents at a time when their agemates are going to school. This habit, she notes, has contributed to lack of women from Turkana in positions of leadership both in the public and private sectors.

"Something must be done to reverse the trend and ensure that girls go to school just as their boy counterparts," Lokuruka reiterates as she reflects the situation on the ground.

She notes that while joining school remains a challenge for the Turkana girl, completing primary schooling

and moving on to secondary level is not easy either. She recalls that during her time in secondary school out of 36 girls that joined Form One, only 18 managed to complete as the rest were married off on insistence of their parents.

### Achievement

To have moved from being forced out of school and back, Lokuruka was determined that she would prove her father wrong. She managed to go through secondary school after becoming the best overall from the school and ended up being the first female to attain university education from the County through the support of the Catholic Church and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.

From Wambaa Secondary School where she was appointed the school head girl, she got admission to Loreto High School where she did her A levels.

Even as she was excelling in her education, back at home his father was a worried man as he did not have livestock and his brothers refused to give him some livestock claiming that he blundered by taking his daughter to school instead of marrying her off to have livestock.

She graduated with Bachelors of Education and was posted as a teacher to Lorgum in Turkana County. She would rise through the ranks to the position of deputy principal.

However, teaching was not going to help her meet the dreams that she had harboured of helping her community. Soon Lokuruka quit teaching and joined a Norwegian project that was involved in collection of Turkana community cultural heritage as a project coordinator.

This did not last long as she became jobless when the government severed diplomatic relations with the Norwegian government on allegation that they were supporting fugitives that were planning to topple the government of then President Moi.

Later in 1992, Lokuruka joined Egerton University as an administrator and was posted to the department of admissions.

"I realised that there was no student from Turkana and the rest of Northern Kenya. I soon embarked on ensuring that students from the region also get admission in the college," she notes.

Courtesy of her initiative, 300 students joined the college and today the number has risen as the college administration has seen the need of admitting students from all parts of the country.

In a bid to help improve the education standard in the county, Lokuruka has managed to get scholarships

***"Just like women from other communities, Turkana women too need to wake up to the reality and stop marrying off their daughters at an early age and allow them to go to school for the sake of their education"***

— Pauline Akai Lokuruka



**Pauline Akai Lokuruka, a deputy director at the Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies in Egerton University during an interview with the Kenyan Woman. She plans to contest for the woman representative seat during the coming general elections. Picture: Henry Owino**

for 20 students from poor families.

She soon fulfilled her father's wishes of getting married. Lokuruka is married to Prof Michael Lokuruka, a lecturer at Karatina University and they are blessed with four grown up children.

She is one of the founders and chairperson of Turkana Women Development Fund (TWDF), an organisation that helps women from the region in their development needs.

Through her experience and involvement in women and girl-child development, and education issues Lokuruka founded this organisation to help educate women from Turkana community to begin to value education of their children.

### Advantage

Having been among the first girls from the community to go to school, Lokuruka's efforts towards creating awareness amongst the people on matters of education and general development places her ahead of other contesters whose role towards giving back to the community is minimal.

"Just like women from other communities, Turkana women too need to wake up to the reality

and stop marrying off their young daughters at early age and allow them go to school for the sake of their education and have a better standard of living," she says.

Having grown up in the region, she has lived and seen firsthand the constraints facing girl-child education and empowerment within pastoralist communities.

Lokuruka observes that many young girls drop out of school and marry early on insistence from their parents; something she says must stop to help the region produce women leaders as is the case with other parts of the country.

"You must all go to school and begin to help other people as well for the betterment of the region," she tells young girls from the area.

However, even though the girl child has suffered greatly from gender discrimination, Lokuruka also has great interest in the state of the boy child that is too not taken care of just like is the case with the girl child.

"I intend to promote the education of the boy child by promoting activities that empowers them just as is the case with the girl child so that they both develop at par," she says.

Lokuruka now hopes to benefit from women and male voters following her effort in bringing women together in discussing development and

education matters. She is encouraging voter building capacity so that both men and women can see that they are the same and should have equal entitlements.

Through the fund, most women have been empowered as majority have taken up managing their own businesses instead of relying on livestock keeping. This has enabled them have a sustainable source of livelihood.

While working as curator designate with the Norwegians, she documented information on indigenous food plants amongst the Turkana community in order to sustain their use and conserve seeds.

She also promoted home tree planting pilot project with emphasis on indigenous food and fuel wood plants in the area.

Besides serving as a lecturer, Lokuruka is also sits in the board Nakuru District Education board and also board member of Turkwell boys High School and Turkana Girls High School

She has previously served as a board member of Kerio Valley Development Authority (KVDA), a regional development authority with the mandate of developing rural areas.

To date, she is a National delegate of Kenya Union of Savings Cooperative organization (KUSCO) where she will serve till the end of next year.



# No turning back as Somali women chart their course

...By Adow Kalil

They arrived in their droves at Masalani Primary School in Ijara District, Garissa County in North-Eastern Province.

Each of them silently took her position under acacia tree. This was not the usual parents' meeting in the school but a rare event where women in a community that has grossly denied them an opportunity to be heard were having their first ever meeting of "disobedience" against their Somali conservative culture.

They came out in large numbers and their mission was to give a 'red card' to patriarchy which has denied them equal representation in top leadership positions and in political decision-making processes.

The meeting that caused a stir in the district and had tongues wagging in most public joints was not the usual gathering of women activists and neither was it organised by gender activists. It was a simple gathering that brought together illiterate house wives who vowed to push for their rights to be heard during the coming General Election.

## Boldness

Donned in "Dircaa", a traditional Somali women in-house dressing and singing dirges, symbolising the end of male dominance in decision making processes, they held a six hour meeting under the acacia trees at the school before making their statement of intent.

And in a clear indication that they plan to chart their political destiny on how and who to vote for in the upcoming general elections, they turned away men and equally educated women who dared to join them in their protest.

Speaker after speaker spoke of how they have been left out of politics in North-Eastern region while men dominated all positions of leadership despite the fact that they rarely participated in voting during elections.

Nominated Councillor Bustay Dahir said that men have in the past used retrogressive and outdated cultural practices to deny them their civic right in electing leaders of their choice and instead forced them to support leaders endorsed by their husbands or male relatives.

## Discrimination

"During every election year, politicians seeking national or local political positions enter pre-election arrangements with male voters, mainly elders and hence disregarding women and youth in the process," the women said.

They added that even after signing pre-election agreements and soliciting for bribes from respective candidates, majority of the elders never participate in the elections and thus only women cast votes during the elections.

"Somali women have repeatedly been short-changed by local and national politicians after they are elected since none of them is willing to address their plight," noted Fatuma Rinow.

She observed that majority of



*In a move against tradition, Garissa women stand defiant in a bid to chart their political destiny. Below: Nominated Councillor Bustay Dahir addresses the women during the meeting held at Masalani Primary School in Ijara District, Garissa County. Photos: Adow Kalil*

women have been religiously voting every other election in this county. "But I can tell you with a lot of confidence that none of them has ever had access even to their local councillor," Rinow reiterated.

"We are unable to access our leaders, whether councillors or MPs because men have always abrogated to themselves the role of serving as our mouthpiece," she said.

Rinow noted that women have been forced to go through other people to see their elected representatives.

## Surprise

According to Ashia Idle, politicians who pass through men with the hope of securing their vote are in for a rude shock in the coming General Election since the pastoralists women in the area are now determined to make aspiring leaders pass the test of leadership as outlined in Chapter Six of the Constitution, which talks of leadership integrity and qualities.

The women later took an oath which now binds them to unite ahead of the General Elections and beyond to ensure that this time round they will ignore men who are fond of deciding for them the leaders to elect.

Despite the 2009 national census indicating that women were four times more than their male counterparts in North-Eastern region, they were rarely involved in any decision making processes including on issues which uniquely concern them.

In 2007 General Elections, out of



the more three hundred women who contested for civic seats, only two — Councillor Rukia Abdulle Abdullahi of Laghbokol North of Wajir County and Councillor Hani Hassan Hussein of Fino Ward in Mandera County sailed through, while majority were dropped at the clan's primaries in favour of male candidates despite their popularity with voters.

## Disparities

In Wajir County Council, out of the 64 councillors in the civic body, only six are women with five of them being nominated by their respective political parties.

In Mandera County Council, women only account for four councillors out of the 54 civic leaders with three of them being nominated while one is elected.

In Mandera Town Council out of the 10 councillors there is just one nominated female councillor.

In Garissa County Council, the provincial headquarters of the North-Eastern Province, there is only one woman out of the 43 councillors in the civic body, while in the Garissa Municipal Council, none of the eight civic leaders is a woman. In Ijara County Council there is one female councillor out of the 10 civic leaders.

Abdullahi who is an elected councillor was endorsed by the clan in a rare turn of events during the 2007 General Elections. She says the prospects of enjoying women's gains in the new constitution remains remote for most pastoralist women because the council of elders still wields immense powers in endorsing candidates for any elective posts.

## Challenges

"It is always difficult for women to be heard by the council of elders, let alone selling their agenda to the people. In the event that the clan

gives you a hearing, it is always a herculean task for your clan to propose your name to the other clans for support because fronting a woman is tantamount to being disrespectful. That gives your male rival an upper edge in any elective contest," she says.

Abdullahi is, however, optimistic that the clan will cede ground for women. She says that currently the clan plans to appoint her and a colleague from Wajir to the position of chairperson in a complete departure from tradition.

"This move is a clear indication that clan elders are convinced that women perform better than their male counterparts in leadership positions. They have realised male politicians relocate to urban areas with their families after they are elected while women leaders remain with them during good and difficult times," explains Abdullahi in an interview.

## Women threaten to boycott elections

...By John Maina

Women in Nakuru County have threatened to boycott the General Election if sitting Members of Parliament fail to come up with clear formulae on how to

implement the two thirds gender rule.

The women led by Hilda Kimata who has indicated interest for the Bahati Parliamentary seat said the proposal to implement the principle progressively contravenes the Constitution.

Speaking during a workshop for

women aspirants that was organised by the Centre for Conflict Management in collaboration with Business and Professionals Women Club of Kenya, Kimata said the constitutional provision must be upheld to avoid plunging the country into a crisis after the election.

Nakuru Town legislator Lee Kinyanjui who attended the meeting called on women to take the leadership challenges positively and go for different elective positions.

"The time when women were viewed as property are long gone and

women all over the world who have risen and faced challenges have made big differences in the society," noted Kinyanjui.

He singled out the late Prof Wangari Maathai who did a commendable job in protecting the environment.



# Talks of elections pacts leave women watching on the side lines

...Wanjiku Mwaura

As the political activity heightens and parties seek to draw pre-election pacts, women politicians are caught up in a quagmire.

The voice that the Constitution was expected to give them seems to be muffled as party bigwigs go into an overdrive to make 'coalitions' before the elections in March next year. For now, a conscious decision to include women in political parties as required in the Constitution seems to have been overshadowed as big parties like ODM, TNA, URP and UDM among others craft their 'winning strategies'.

"Look at the parties, women are running the secretariats, and I mean they are the secretaries and all other jobs in party headquarters, but that is as far as they go," says.

"When leaders of ODM, TNA, URP, Wiper Democratic Party and UDM says they are talking to like minded partners it means the exclusive political club," she says.

## Numbers

The body language, say analysts, is that other aspirants like Martha Karua and Charity Ngilu do not have the

political muscle that coalitions need to ascend to power.

There has not been the slightest hint from any of the male aspirants they would consider a woman even as a running mate.

"It is sad the male politicians are busy making decisions on their own and women supporters in their parties are expected to 'live with the decisions,'" says Pauline Kimani, an activist working with marginalised groups.

"It seems women will just be followers of parties and not decision makers for a long time. Our politics is about money and power. Few women have that, and this is the reason they are said to bring 'nothing' to the table," says Rhoda Atieno, who runs an online feminist forum.

## Strategies

"This is the way our politics work, men draw up the strategies. Women's work mostly is to dance as the strategies are being launched. The way it works is to get a few women to convince the rest that it is alright to be on the side lines of decision making, and that way discriminative plans get a life," says Atieno.

The excitement of the prospective women in politics as



A group of women leaders engage in a discussion during a meeting organized by Tuvuke Initiative

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— Rhoda Atieno.

envisioned in the Constitution seems to have died down.

## Bargaining power

The Women Political Alliance of Kenya was formed to increase the bargaining power, but they have not made it into the inner circle.

With the women voters

not even solidly behind either Narc-Kenya Karua or Narc's Ngilu, there seems to be little inclinations to consider their views on pre-election pacts.

Even the so-called 'elders' caucuses' apparently guiding communities on the political path to take, women have been left out.

NjuriNcheke, Luo Council of elders, Kalenjin Council

of Elders, Kikuyu Council of Elders, Luyha Council of Elders and Kaya elders have no place for women, says Atieno.

Sadly, the choice women voters will make on who becomes the next president will unlikely be because of the agenda that person has for them, it will be because of tribalism, which is the card the parties are waving as the winning strategy, she says.

# The time is now, and we are not turning back

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Williams said the challenge remains for women to take men to account when it comes to the elections in March 4, 2013.

He noted that Kenya is a big player in the continent and cannot allow itself to be denied the position in not fulfilling the affirmative action.

"It is women who will bring change. It is unacceptable for Kenya to be a giant in the region but fail in achieving the one third principle," noted Williams.

## Caution

In a move that saw them demonstrate, the women warned the two Principals — President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga — that they must make sure that the law is respected and carried out to the letter.

Naima Achieng, Organising Secretary Sauti ya Wanawake sent out the warning saying: "Let the principals know that should they deny women this opportunity that rightly belongs to them, politics will never be the same gain in this county."

Her sentiments were echoed by Sophia Abdi, who is a Nominated MP who said: "If the Gender parity Bill flops, let the women vie without party or tribe but as women and their party should be women."

According to Maendeleo ya Wanawake Chairperson Rukia Subow parliamentarians should stop joking with women's gains in the Constitution.

"There is no difference between the men and women of Rwanda and

those of Kenya. Women need to listen to what the MPs are saying and ensure their issues in the constitution are protected."

Subow urged women from the Coast to ensure women are elected. "Women must join any political party for them to be in political leadership," said Subow. She added: "They must also sing and dance for women leaders. Elected women leaders should also respect women in the electorate."

According to Daisy Amdany, chairperson Women Political Alliance, the constitution was supported in the referendum mainly because of the good and positive things that it had including affirmative action. "We voted for the Constitution because it has gains for women. This forum organised by Sauti ya Wanawake is to raise the woman's voice to ensure that our parliamentarians get to hear that women want to be political leaders." She added: Women must come out to vie for political positions so that the people who are saying there will be no numbers can be ashamed."

## Participation

Speaking at the launch of Launch of a Documentary and a community guidebook on "Access to Informal Justice Women and their communities on Land, Property and Inheritance Rights by Groots Kenya, Winnie Lichuma, chairperson National Equality and Gender Commission said the constitution has given an opportunity for both men and women to participate in the elections. "We must make Kenyans understand that they can equally elect men and wom-

en. We all need to make gender of the cultural construction of men and women our agenda," said Lichuma.

She noted the "great need to change perceptions that gender is about women, it is about men and women. We must call on the Council of Elders to appreciate women."

"Women must campaign and ask both men and women to vote for them. Women must come out and change the propaganda that women should only go for the County Women representative position," noted Lichuma.

## Constitution

Human rights does not come on a silver platter and this is why issues of human rights have been entrenched in the Constitution.

The Constitution has given women room to participate in elections and all elective positions including the presidency. They are also free to contest the seats of governor, senator, MP, County Ward and Women's representatives.

"Women must register with political parties and come out to vie. Women must come out and participate in competitive politics," reiterated Lichuma.

"If women are not elected and they come through party nomination list it will be expensive for this country," she said.

A one third gender representation in political party nomination is mandatory.

"By electing women we will reduce the cost that we would incur by nominating them. The more we vote in women, the lesser we will nominate

women through the party list."

These sentiments were echoed by Amdany the Mombasa meeting that was convened by Action Aid. "Women have opportunities to come out and vie for leadership positions and they must be supported by other women," said Amdany who also called on MPs to support the bill. She added: "Any leader who fails to support the bill will not be elected."

## Endorsement

In a sign to show that there is no turning back, a huge number of women stood up and expressed their interest in various political positions including MP, Senator, youth representative, women representative, ward representative as well as the disabled.

The members of Parliament present at the meeting indicated their backing for the Gender Parity Bill and said they will support and lobby for the bill to get maximum support.

Ekwe Ethuro, MP for Turkana Central said: "We want to ensure that through the Gender Parity Bill women will take up leadership positions. We are working to ensure that women and youth get elected to national and county assemblies."

Ethuro urged women to look out for leaders who promote women's issues. "This is the one who should be elected in the Presidency."

Issac Ruto, MP for Chepalungu said that in Bomet County, which has four constituencies, they are already at 50-50 parity with two men and two women legislators. "This country should follow our example and have half women and half men since

the country cannot develop without the support of the other half of the population."

He noted: "To get rid of poverty and illiteracy, women must be with men in positions of leadership. We will ensure that the bill is passed."

His sentiments were echoed by Dr Joyce Laboso, MP for Sotik who said that women are special but women must dialogue with men so that the gains can be passed.

"We are pushing for the two thirds principle and have women elected. Nominating women will bring in more problems," noted Laboso. She said: "Women should come out and vie for positions. They should embrace men and youth."

## Embrace

Laboso reiterated that women who have been given the opportunity must prove themselves and Kenyans must also learn to embrace women's leadership."

According to Sophia Abdi, the Kenya Women's Parliamentary association is asking presidential candidates to support the bill. "They must walk the talk and assure women that they are support the two third principle," said Abdi. She added: "Women should ask for 50-50 gender parity and this can be achieved by women."

And in the end the warning that the women sent out was Wakati ni Sasa. Amkeni Wanawake. Haturudi Nyuma (The Time Is Now; Arise Women; No Turning Back)."



# Women must be at the forefront in peace building

...By Odhiambo Orla

The future of peace building and conflict management in the country is promising, thanks to the bigger role being played by women leaders and groups.

According to S. K. Maina, National Coordinator of the National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management, when women put their foot down and say "enough is enough", their men usually step back and think twice.

According to Maina, the National Steering Committee on Peace Building has learnt a lot from the best practices of several women leaders and groups in Wajir and Garissa who have spearheaded peace initiatives among and between the warring clans and their neighbours.

Says Maina: "As Kenyans, we have lived in denial for too long thinking that we are an island of peace surrounded by violence."

## Misconception

Addressing participants at a recent UN-Women high level conference on peace and security, Maina lamented that there had been a misconception that most conflict were confined to pastoralists and their neighbours over pasture and water. This was a myth because other communities also have their issues and differences.

He reminded the forum that

there were many explosive issues in the country which had been swept under the carpet and were like a time bomb waiting to explode unless they were resolved soon and amicably.

"In fact, it is disheartening that some Kenyans are still hacking each other in this day and age in Tana Delta where over 100 lives had been lost instead of sitting down around a table and dialoguing and resolving their differences," he noted.

## Peace Crusaders

However, he reiterated that there is light at the end of the tunnel as several women leaders and women's groups have been spearheading peace building initiatives across the country.

He cited Wajir and Mandera as the success stories led by the late Dekha Ibrahim Abdi and Nominat-

ed MP Sofia Abdi respectively.

Indeed, to many the 1964-born peace champion was not just a Right Livelihood Laureate, also referred to as the 'Alternative Nobel Peace Prize' but a global peacemaker on a path many dared not to tread.

In the citation that came with Dekha's award in 2007, she was recognised for "showing how to reconcile ethnic and cultural diversity, even after violent conflict that can be entwined with a cooperative process to nurture peace and development".

## Defiance

To those who knew her before she died a year ago, she was simply 'Dekha', a woman who chose peace making at a time and in a region where such roles were entrusted to men.

It was in 1993, when the drums

of war sounded between the Degodia and Ajuran clans in North Eastern province as preparation for the then Wajir West (now Wajir South) by elections climaxed.

She then decided to make a change after being disturbed by the incessant rattle of gunfire and clan division. By then she was an employee of the Nomadic Healthcare Programme. The rest, as they say, is history.

According to Maina, other success stories in the region are among the Karamajong in Uganda where women have joined the peace committees and are spreading the message to their husbands, sons and the community at large with the full blessing of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Says Maina: "In 2007-2008 we were caught unaware, but this time

around we have no excuse. We need to retrace our steps as a nation and reconcile ourselves. We need to start protecting our women and children as we used to do in the traditional society."

## Illicit arms

However, he noted that one of the biggest threat to peace in the country is the proliferation of illicit arms from across the porous borders into the wrong hands. At the last count, he says, there were between 400,000 to 600,000 small arms in the wrong hands.

Indeed, a survey by Kenya National Focal Point on Small Arms and the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey reveals that the majority of the arms were concentrated in the hands of pastoralists from North Eastern regions as well as in major urban centres such as Nairobi and Mombasa where they are used in committing crimes.

At the moment, he lamented, most Kenyans have a double personality. They are nationalists at national forums and tribal chauvinists when they retreat to their constituencies and counties.

In his patting short, Maina says women must be engaged in peace committees at all levels from the grassroots all the way up to the national stage in order to promote reconciliation and peaceful coexistence across the country as the first General Elections under the new Constitution beckons.



*"In 2007-2008 we were caught unaware, but this time around we have no excuse. We need to retrace our steps as a nation and reconcile ourselves. We need to start protecting our women and children as we used to do in the traditional society."*

— S. K. Maina

# Kenyans get lessons on affirmative action rule

...By Henry Owino

Although Rwanda is small in size and a young country born in 1962 as most African States, it remains a nation of reference in terms of democracy and gender parity.

Rwanda suffered during the 1994 genocide that left over 800,000 people dead. However it has since recovered and is growing by leaps and bounds.

Today Rwanda is leading the world with having the highest number of women in Parliament, standing at 56 per cent. Kenya, a giant in the region is lagging behind all the East African states at only nine per cent.

## Important lessons

Kenyan women have a lot to learn from their Rwandan counterparts as far as politics is concerned.

According to Francesca Tengera, President of National Women's Council in Rwanda, there are ten political parties and four of them are led by women.

All 10 parties are registered and are very active. They are co-existing peacefully due to respect they all have for the respective parties' manifesto," says Tengera.

The four parties led by women Rwanda Socialist Party (PSR), Party for Progress and Concord (CPP), Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and Social Democratic Party (PDS).

According to Tengera even though

there are many political parties, only one is dominant and this is the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) which is in power.

Although opposition parties are allowed, they are widely considered to have no real chance of gaining power.

"Rwanda always has a Special Bill to refer to — the 1994 genocide that left more than 800,000 people dead and scores injured," said Tengera. She added: "May be what we went through taught us the importance of democracy and peace."

Addressing a high level UN-Women conference in Nairobi recently for over 300 women from the five East African countries, Tengera pointed out that the genocide was a lesson that they would not want to see repeated and that is why democracy is top on their agenda as with it comes gender equality.

## Disparity

In contrast, Kenya has over 50 registered political parties and only two are led by women. These are National Rainbow Coalition (Narc) led Charity Kaluki Ngilu and Narc-Kenya, led by Martha Karua. The two women are also in the 2013 presidential race.

Ngilu will be having a second stab at State House, the first time having been in 1997 when she stood against President Moi and was ranked fourth after Mwai Kibaki, Raila Odinga and Wamalwa Kijana among scores of

other presidential candidates.

Tengera maintains that Kenyans should emulate Rwanda's style of voting by electing women aspirants regardless of political party affiliation.

She appealed to Kenyan voters to learn to view women aspirants as potential leaders and not look their tribes, parties, education level or wealth in order to vote for them for whatever positions are being floated.

"I would like to encourage Kenya women to vie for various political offices rather than flocking for in the special seat set aside for women," said Tengera. She advised: "You need to diversify your priorities right and avoid putting all your eggs in one basket."

## Support

In Rwanda, many women are encouraged to vie for political positions so that 30 per cent or more representation in Parliament is achieved and this is why Rwanda leads in having more women parliament.

The Government of Rwanda respects the 30 per cent affirmative action policy which has led to over 50 per cent of MPs in the land-locked country being women. According to Madam Anna Margareth, Member of Parliament (MP) and chair Women Cross Party Platform, Tanzania, women should stand for what they believe in no matter the challenges.

Margareth who has been in Parliament for more than ten years says things have not been smooth either.

Margareth urged women to design their own agenda and follow it to the letter and spirit by being firm to it no matter how rough and bumpy the going might be.

She appealed to those vying for various seats for the first time to get prepared to withstand abuses and falsehood being levelled against them.

"Strong opposition from your opponents should not scare or discourage you from running. It is just one of the methods opponents use to block and frustrate you in the race. So be vibrant and develop strong and a tough skin to rest all arrows shot to you," advised Margareth.

## Unity

Asked to explain what has made her compatriots united and nationalistic, Margareth said what has helped peace and unity to prevail is the use of a common language, Kiswahili, by the leaders and the public at all public forums and educational institutions.

The language is used widely and has facilitated eradication of tribalism among citizens from village to national level.

According to Solome Kimbugwe, chairperson Forum for Women in Democracy, Uganda, there is no discrimination of gender, status, academic level or race among MPs. Anybody is free to be elected as a chair of any parliamentary committee.

Kimbugwe said: "There are no seats which are either inferior or su-

perior or simply "flower seats", all of them are equal in terms of influence in Parliament to what the constituents require done for them."

At the same, Elizabeth Ongoro who is the MP for Kasarani and an Assistant minister for Nairobi Metropolitan announced that she will be vying for Nairobi Senator's seat.

Ongoro urged fellow women to work close with their political party leaders and chairpersons. She warned them to avoid being lone rangers or labelled as rebels.

## Engage

"Kenyan women must work extra hard to realise the two third principle and avoid being spoon-fed by being nominated," she reiterated.

As a way forward, Ongoro asked Police Commissioner Matthew Itere, to deploy more officers to violence prone areas to avert skirmishes during the campaigns and on elections day next year.

"It is good that Commissioner of Police is here with us to listen to women's grievances so that he can act in advance before problems of insecurity get out of hand," Ongoro said.

She took the opportunity to tell the women aspirants about the advantage of a peaceful electoral process and asked them to be at the forefront of preaching peace.

Ongoro pleaded with the youth not to allow themselves to be bought and used by politicians to cause chaos, mayhem and violence.



# A medic admired by patients and employees

...By Robert Nyagah

From resolving management crisis at health facilities to overseeing expansion of others and boosting morale among health workers and ensuring provision of drugs and medical equipment, Dr Anisa Omar, the current Coast Provincial Director of Public Health and Sanitation has won many accolades in Coast Province.

Malindi District Hospital her last station of duty had held a dark record until she arrived. She found a health institution that was down on its knees.

When she took over, it was a deplorable facility with a staff that worked under very demoralizing circumstances.

Majority of health personnel in Malindi District still recall her support as they sought to pursue further education in their various areas of specialisation while at work.

The paediatrician who moved from Malindi District Hospital in October 2008 left unforgettable marks at the institution.

Some, who started at lower cadres are today in the final stages of achieving degrees in their careers while many have earned degrees and promotions several grades up after they elevated their professional qualifications.

Majority disclose it was through Omar's support that they earned a study leave and scholarships apart from research assistance.

## Restoration

When at Malindi, she became unpopular among owners of private health facilities because she had within a short stay at the institution let thousands of Malindi people regain confidence with the treatment at the government facility and they were daily trooping there for high class services.

The facilities literally lost clients as hundreds heard services at the district hospital had improved tremendously.

Just a few months ago, she successfully used her management skills to rescue a rural health institution from collapse when infighting at one time forced the German heart specialist volunteer Dr Alof Forster to abandon the Ramada Health Centre in fear of what was termed as witchcraft and threats on the physicians life.

The German was pushed to frustration and abandoned the health facility he had seen develop to cool down as he considered to return home all together.

To end the stalemate she disbanded the management committee and declared that Forster was the head of the health institution arguing that he was in Kenya legally having fulfilled all the government requirements to practice as a medical doctor.

Due to her intervention, the health facility is now so famous to the extent that it receives patients from neighbouring Tanzania, Lamu, Tana River, Tana Delta, Malindi, Mombasa, Kwale and Taita Taveta districts among other places.

Omar wondered why some people wanted to interfere with the work of the German heart specialist yet he had sacrificed a life of wealth, comfort and luxury in Europe to stay in a poor rural Kenyan village enjoying only the basics of life while treating the sick citizens.

## Achiever

Omar started her career after internship at the Coast General Hospital where she successfully served between 1986 and 1987. She had a short stint at the Kinango sub-District Hospital Kwale where she served as a Medical Officer working across all the departments including paediatrics, medicine, obstetrics, gynaecology and surgery while sometimes assisting in management duties.

In 1988, she was promoted to a MOH at the same Sub district hospital during which she managed issues such as budgets, purchasing while she supervised the peripheral the peripheral health facilities in Kinango catchment area that included one health centre and five dispensaries



*Dr Anisa Omar, the Coast Provincial Director of Public Health and Sanitation. She has become a darling to many owing to hard work and ability to transform health facilities into viable centres of excellence during a recent interview. Picture: Robert Nyagah*

Towards the end of 1988, Omar was promoted to acting District Medical Officer of Health. Between 1989-1992 she moved to Kenyatta National hospital underrating a post-graduate degree programme in paediatrics where she worked in various units among them the general children's ward: oncology ward, renal unit, intensive care unit, dermatology, psychiatric unit as well as at the Infectious Diseases Hospital for three months in adult medical wards.

Omar a keen professional was known for mentoring young professionals while at Kenyatta National Hospital where she tutored medical students rotating in Paediatric ward. She worked with a panel of examiners- handling clinical examinations in Medical Training Centre and specifically dealt with third and fourth year's students.

While undertaking her masters, Omar took time to lecture at Kenya Medical Training Centre where she handled clinical officers undergoing post-basic training. Before her move to Malindi, she had a stint at the Kilifi District Hospital as the paediatrician between 1992 to 1995.

Sharpened professionally, Omar's bosses at Afya House moved her to Malindi where she first served as the Hospital Paediatrician between 1995 and 2000. Between 2000 and 2008, Omar had a dual role serving as the Medical Superintendent of the Malindi District Hospital and District Medical Officer of Health.

## Regulations

As required under the law guiding medical practitioners Omar is a Member of Kenya Medical Association since 1986 to date, the Kenya Paediatric Association since 1992 and KMAP (Kenya Muslims and Professionals).

She also holds a professional license after having registered with the Kenya Medical and Dentist Board since 1987. Her experience in work is strengthened by the fact that she has in the past also served in private institutions first as a resident medical officer at Pandya Memorial Hospital Mombasa between 1988 and 1992.

As required under the law guiding those practicing medicine Omar is a member of Kenya Medical Association (KMA) since 1986, the Kenya Paediatric Association since 1992

to date and Kenya Muslims and Professionals (KMAP).

She also holds a professional license after having registered with the Kenya Medical and Dentist Board since 1987. Omar, a medical doctor practiced general medicine for 3 years and specialised in paediatrics in 1992 and practicing to date.

When she worked at Malindi hospital, Omar launched major systems to reward hard working personnel and sometimes nurses and other health workers doing extra hours had a way to be compensated.

Long after she left the Malindi District Hospital where she served as a Medical Officer of Health (MOH) in charge, relatives of the sick and other visitors who frequent the institution still talk positively about her.

## Reputation

"She dealt with all classes of patients equally and could abandon official duties to attend to a desperately sick child at the ward," notes Mrs Agripina Ndwiwa.

Ndwiwa explains that despite her position at the hospital, she handled cases with diligence while working so cordially with nurses and other personnel at the ward.

Majority of those who enjoyed services at the hospital while she served still insist that had she remained, the hospital would have gained more from donors and that way even improve services to patients.

But when Omar reported to the hospital and was confronted with all the many bad things at the institution, she did not react like many young professional would do, quickly look for a transfer to go and work in a better institution.

She admits that the situation was bad and that the hospital needed attention so as to be improved to a position in which it could provide patients with required services.

Working with a team of health personnel, Omar first launched a study to ascertain what

was lacking in equipment and what each section of what required improvement or acquisition would cost.

## Initiative

While surveying the required equipment, Omar first penetrated the staff and by creating a good working rapport with all the personnel while encouraging each to play his role positively even with the limited equipment.

Less than a year after she took over office, Omar spearheaded the formation of Malindi District Hospital Management Team which brought together stakeholders from the main sectors in the tourist resort. The team pushed for the implementation of strategies to improve the management of resources from the government and the private sector.

"I was keen to involve all stakeholders including local and international investors who were keen to see the hospital improve given that apart from serving Kenyans, it had also the potential to serve foreigners and in this cause tourists patronizing local Hotels," says Omar.

## Goodwill

Although Omar at first faced many huddles, she took advantage of the good will she was receiving from investors in tourism who even encouraged direct donations to the hospital. At one time there was a sense of competition as Italian, German and British donors poured various donations at the hospital.

The best moments for Omar was when the Canadian Aid Agency Danida came into Malindi and after an evaluation of the situation decided to support not only Malindi District Hospital but also all the health facilities in the rural parts of the District.

Danida undertook some of the most major projects at the Hospital completely changing the face of the institution hitherto only associated with suffering. Today Malindi has modern female and male wards, a funeral home, modern maternity wing, a children's ward and some of the most modern theatre, X-ray and laboratories.

In 2000 she was awarded a Head of State Commendation Award for exemplary work. In 2010 she was awarded Order of the Grand Warrior Award for service to the public.

*Omar is a renowned health professional known for mentoring budding health care workers and makes sure all patients access quality service*



# Susan Nyongesa

## Hopes to unlock unexploited potential through integrated high leadership approach

...By Robert Wanjala

On her three-acre family parcel of land, she has set up poultry, dairy, fish ponds, green house demonstration, tissue culture banana and sugarcane plantation which her villagers come to learn various farming practices.

Indeed, she is a woman on mission to end poverty, ignorance and disease in her Webuye West Constituency through educating fellow women, youth and men on the economic opportunities brought about by the new Constitution under a devolved system of Government.

For Susan Nyongesa, where there is a will there is a way. She sees achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) before 2015 as challenging but possible.

She was born, bred and married in the same constituency and maintains that she has a better understanding and solutions for most of the social and economic challenges facing the residents.

### Experience

"I have lived in this village long enough to understand every bit of the struggle and the economic potential that Bokoli Ward has. Poverty and ignorance remain the biggest problems and I think that with the right political leadership they can be solved," Nyongesa says.

Bokoli is endowed with fertile land and favourable climatic conditions. The farms are cultivated mostly by women while men sit idle at the market place wasting away in political bickering as they wait for handouts from politicians.

### Inspiration

Nyongesa is making her debut into the turbulent politics on a Ford Kenya ticket. While her entry into politics for Bokoli Ward seat initially stirred some discomfort among the male figures including own her husband but the spirit to change the fortunes of people cheered her on.

Growing up in a deeply conservative and traditional background that tags women as inferior responsibilities, Nyongesa says she knew what her political ambitions would cause but braved on with the belief that change was inevitable, though painful at times, its time had come.

Today, her husband, George Waswa Nyongesa, is her most trusted chief political advisor and strategist campaigner.

She is so proud of him because most men are aware that 'times have changed'. Women have become assertive and it's no longer a secret about it.

### Gaps

She says: "The new Constitution has just come to affirm that indeed it's time women took the instruments of power and provide alternative leadership for the greater good of this country."

The parliamentary aspirant says the past leadership did fairly good but ignored pertinent issues that have led to high poverty levels be-



Susan Nyongesa stresses a point during an interview with the Kenyan woman. She plans to contest for Bokoli ward seat in Bungoma County. Photo Robert Wanjala

ing witnessed today in Bokoli ward and in the entire County.

Bungoma County has a population of over 1.6 million with Bokoli Ward registering 30,000 people according to 2009 population census.

Statistics available shows subsistence agriculture as the main economic activity of region. However, poverty levels in the County stands at 53 per cent.

Nyongesa maintains that time has come for a woman to take over the political leadership of that ward and spearhead development agenda to greater heights.

### Opportunity

The new Constitution is two years old and has offered women a window of opportunity to take over elective and non-elective leadership positions through affirmative action and merit.

Other than farming, Nyongesa spends every opportunity to educate women on their rights as afforded to them under the supreme law.

"Enabling them to know their Constitutional rights will help them overcome stereotyping as well as resist male chauvinisms and become more proactive not only in leadership but also in other economic activities," she asserts.

Given space, Nyongesa says, women can bring great changes in society citing the famous merry-go-round savings schemes. She encourages sharing with fellow women her saving skills and by forming strong farming groups for marketing and selling of their produce.

You can call her a jack-of-all-trades. Instead of waiting for her husband to provide everything, she has managed to supplement her husband's efforts by paying their children's education fees through proceeds from her projects in poultry, dress-making as well as selling sweet potatoes and milk.

She has rescued many girls who had dropped out of school in the village and offered them training in tailoring and making potatoes crisps.

She sells the crisps which has provided employment to several youths working both at the production point and who distribute these snacks across the larger County's learning institutions.

### Action plan

"Tackling unemployment and poverty remains an issue dear to my heart. The political mandate given to me by the residents will focus on trainable skills such as tailoring, food processing and intensive farming for youths and women who for many years have been side-lined," promises the mother of five children.

Dairy, poultry and fish farming activities have been her source of livelihood and family diet. Her fish ponds have over 500 fish which is mainly for family consumption.

"I believe mixed farming is the way to go for many household stuck in abject poverty. There is potential in farming and with the right leadership that focuses on maximum land cultivation, this region will be free from malnourishment and also be food sufficient," she notes. If elected, the 42 year-old, farmer and businesswoman plans to use her office to unlock the area's unexploited potential through integrated high leadership approach aimed at transforming the livelihood of her people for the realisation of the MDGs and other social commitments.

## Why do Kenyans choose violence as the first defence?

...By Rosemary Okello

Every single day the media is awash with images of violence taking place in the various parts of Kenya. There is no single day, that news bulletin is without any violence or laced with violence terminologies. It is a worrying trend and it is slowly engulfing the country.

The stories of minors being raped, clans fighting, cattle rustlings mob justice, demonstrations which in the end turn violent are far too much daily doses for media consumers to the extent that quite a number of young people are not watching television news. They have instead turn to social media which is not any better.

Concerns are now being raised that Kenyans tend to choose violence as the first defence instead of embracing peace, or use alternative dispute resolution mechanism. There is much so going by the current violence in the country and if every Kenyan will take peace as the first defence, it can make a huge difference.

As the saying goes that conflict is the human nature, as a country we can choose how we deal with it and this is what will differentiate us from the rest of other nations that have been destroyed by conflict. It will also determine whether we will survive or perish.

This came out clearly during the recent National Conference on Peaceful Elections organised by the Ministry of Justice, Reconciliation and Constitutional Affairs which saw delegates from over 47 Counties in attendance.

Every delegate was concerned with how the Government, media, Civil Society organisations, religious groups and elders will ensure that the country has peaceful elections which can also set the pace for implementation of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 (COK 2010).

### Significance

Peace is a prerequisite in building a new Kenya without violence. With peace, investors can flog into this country and create jobs for the many youths who are now jobless. With peace women can safely go about their business without worrying of insecurity and contribute to the economic growth if this country. With peace, the Gross Domestic Product of this country can grow to double digit. With peace, the opportunities in the COK 2010 can become a reality because the Government will be a position to implement it.

However, if we continue with the current trend where we are embracing violence, the likelihood of this reaching fever pitch is very high and next year when the election take place and we might as a country forget the implementation of the COK 2010.

As eloquently stated by the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Justice, Reconciliation and Constitutional Affairs "if we have a peaceful election, the leadership we are going to elect are the ones who will make the spirit of the new constitution a reality".

It is important as a country to realise and know the price of peace. It is too precious for us to just playing around with it. We know the consequences of not having peace during an electoral process. The Internally Displaced People are always a reminder of the fact that lack of peace can affect us in a more fundamental way that we are able to imagine.

We can make peace a reality and the use of mobile phones can come handy in this regard. Imagine each day every Kenyan sending a peaceful message to their friends or relatives, what impact can such action make. This has potential of turning the tide of violence and can make the coming Election be peaceful.

***"The new Constitution has just come to affirm that indeed it is time women took the instruments of power and provide alternative leadership for the greater good of this country."***

— Susan Nyongesa



# Retrogressive practices will deny women entry into leadership opportunities

...By Ben Oroko

Though the constitution has offered women in the country political and socio-economic opportunities, outdated cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) among the Gusii community continues to deprive many young and innocent girls of education.

A majority of women can hardly enjoy the gains enshrined in the new Constitutional dispensation for lack of education.

Scores of women in the Kisii and Nyamira counties stare at a bleak future as majority of them risk being locked out of the political process as they lack the required academic qualifications to gun for elective posts.

The sad scenario has been blamed on early marriages that have been fomented by retrogressive practices such as FGM and the local community's disregard to girl-child's education.

## Impunity

Despite the enactment of the Anti-FGM Act 2011, where offenders are fined up to KSh500,000 or a seven year jail term, the practice still continues unabated especially in areas where FGM is highly regarded as a rite of passage.

In Kisii, the war against the practice is far from over as members of the community continue embracing the vice under the guise of protecting culture.

Investigations by the Kenyan Woman indicate that the community has changed tact and abandoned traditional circumcisers in favour of medical practitioners, making it difficult for the law enforcers at the grassroots and the anti-FGM advocates to monitor those who subject their daughters to the outlawed practice.

The proponents of the practice continue dodging the law as they book their daughters in clinics and health facilities ostensibly to seek medication upon which they subject them to FGM.

## Survey

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) FGM is a common practice in a number of countries around the world and over 100 million women and girls are estimated to have passed through the rite.

WHO defines FGM as a procedure involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons.

The practice, according to the WHO, doubles the risk of a woman's death at childbirth and increases the risk of a child being born dead upto four times.

According to the most recent Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS) 2008-2009, there was a reduction in the FGM practice from 32 per cent in 2003 to 27 per cent.

Over the years, the Government and various civil society organisations have intensified the war against FGM through advocacy and public education campaigns, sensitising target communities on the dangers of the practice but culture continues to hamper the war against the vice.

Nyamira County Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO) chairperson, Mary Orwenyo, who has



A group of girls entertain guests during an anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) campaign meeting. Girls have in the past been denied access to education as the vice take a negative toll. Picture: Ben Oroko

been at the forefront of the war against FGM in the region concurs that communities practicing the vice are most likely to practice child marriages.

## Injustices

In an exclusive interview with The Kenyan Woman, after attending an anti-FGM Public Declaration at Gusii County Council grounds in Kisii town, Orwenyo admits that FGM has continued to deny girls their right to education as majority of the parents in the region only view girls as a source of wealth through marriages.

She says that this vice is denying the region future leaders as majority will not meet the academic credentials required for various political and socio-economic positions.

"In some FGM practicing communities, the 'cut' is carried out at puberty stage and then marriages are arranged immediately afterwards. In some instances a man may refuse marrying a girl or woman who has not undergone FGM, fearing a backlash from his peers for marrying a girl perceived as a social outcast," she notes.

Orwenyo, who is eyeing the Women Representative's seat in Nyamira County says child marriage also has varied implications on the social development of child brides as it contributes to low levels of education, poor health and lack of independence in decision making.

## Practice

"It is a common phenomenon in many African societies that girls are less likely to go to school than boys especially in poor households where the situation is compounded by child

marriages, with various studies showing a strong link between a woman's age at marriage and the level of education she attained," states Orwenyo

Majority of the girls who drop out of school, Orwenyo observes, do so due to early marriages, contributing to a large number of illiterate women who got married early.

She says in some conservative African communities, parents are discouraged from educating their daughters as they believe they will only benefit their future family in-laws.

## Disadvantaged

"Lack of education for girls means young brides often lack knowledge about sexual relations and their reproductive health rights since such subjects are treated as cultural secrets whose discussion in public is a taboo," observes Orwenyo. She adds: "This development denies young girls their right to make informed decisions about their sexual relations, family planning and their reproductive health rights."

Various studies in African societies, Orwenyo says, indicate that women who get married early are more likely to experience domestic violence in their marriages.

She also argues that early marriage is linked to rampant cases of wife abandonment and divorce or separation and child brides are at risk of being widowed at a tender age as their husbands who are considerably older pass on.

According to Nyabuto Onyambu, a Programme Officer with Stema Women Development Group, a non-governmental organisation working in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to spearhead anti-FGM war within Mosocho Division, Kisii Central District, those practicing FGM see it through the myopic cultural lens as a rite of passage and graduation of a girl-child to womanhood.

## Support

"The war against FGM in the Gusii region has been receiving considerable support from the local community members, with those supporting the practice seeing it through a myopic cultural eye as a rite of passage and a graduation of a girl-child to adulthood," laments Onyambu.

He says that partnership with UNDP his organization will intensify anti-FGM campaigns and public education targeting communities in Mosocho Division. He notes that with this the number of parents subjecting their daughters to FGM will be scaled down during the project implementation process.

## Strategy

He says his organization will target schools as part of the new strategy to intensify public education and awareness on the dangers of FGM, saying school children are the best ambassadors to spread the anti-FGM messages as majority of them comprise girls who are victims of the vice.

Executive Director Stema Women Development Group Christine Ogwang'i observes that it is a common belief among the Gusii community members that many girls from the community where FGM is universally practised will be psychologically traumatised and suffer exclusion from their peers and immediate family members for failing to go through the 'cut'.

Ogwang'i says that it would be prudent for the anti-FGM advocates to intensify public education targeting men and opinion leaders through peer-to-peer approach as part of the strategy to sensitise them on the dangers of FGM to girls and women.

"It is important that men be brought on board, educated and sensitized that a girl does not need to undergo FGM in order to make a good wife. Until this perception is reversed the outdated cultural practice will continue haunting girls and women even in the presence of deterrent laws," argues Ogwang'i.

## Enforcement

Welcoming the enactment of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011, Ogwang'i expressed reservation about its implementation. "If the Government and anti-FGM advocates fail to step up public education and awareness to sensitise those affected by the legislation, then it will largely remain on paper," she adds.

Mary Mogaka, a Kisii branch manager of the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) whose organization has been implementing anti-FGM activities in the region dismisses the claim that FGM reduces sexual desire among women who have been subjected to the 'cut' on the basis that it results to fewer sexual partners.

She says that the belief is misplaced since there are no proven research findings showing FGM is a remedy to HIV infections among women and girls who have been subjected to FGM.

However, Mogaka challenges the Government through the Ministry of Education to consider introducing anti-FGM curriculum in primary schools to educate and empower children with knowledge on its dangers.

"Introducing anti-FGM curriculum in primary schools will facilitate the efforts of the Government and other partner organizations' efforts in the war against FGM," argues Mogaka.

**Female Genital Mutilation is denying women leaders from Gusii region their quest for leadership as majority can hardly meet the academic credentials required for various political seats."**

— Mary Orwenyo



# Maasai 'tigress' who faced community's retrogressive culture head on

...By Robert Wanjala

An indigenous people, the Maasai community of Kenya faces challenges to their rights and culture. They are a patriarchal society leaving women with limited opportunities for development.

Mary Simat's 'stubbornness' has ceded some ground for a level play field. This is a story of hope and determination, a narrative of perseverance, resilience and faith; an inspirational tale of victory.

She was born 53 years ago from the youngest mother of her father's four wives in a sleepy village of Kanunka in Narok on southern capital city of Kenya.

Simat says she was married off while still in her mother's womb according to community's customs.

"A child can be married off while still unborn, in the hope that it will be a girl. If it turns out to be a boy, it is believed that it will be a good friend to the person who would have married the girl," she explains.

Simat was born at time when Maasai women were not allowed to attend school. Yet determination and resilience for more forced her mother to divorce her father and move to Olpopongi; a more progressive Maasai village than Kanunka.

With this Simat was able to get education instead of early marriage. After finishing her secondary school she joined a teachers' training college, something very unusual for a Maasai woman.

Simat says: "In fact, because few Maasai women become teachers, we are usually then appointed by the Government to teach in our native villages because we are familiar with the customs and language of the communities."

She was posted to Kanunk, the village she left as a little girl obvious of the lurking resentfulness from the custodians of the outmoded traditions.

## Tag

Her stubbornness and resolve to 'poison' women's heads with equality toxin started after she attended a female circumcision awareness workshop in Narok.

"As a teacher, I was invited to workshops in Narok town sponsored by certain NGOs to raise awareness of female genital mutilation and women's rights. I began telling people about the things I was learning at the seminar," she says adding that this was a message the Maasai community needed in order to change their oppressive customs against women.

Contrary to the recent outbursts from Nyeri husbands having a beating field-day, for the Maasai culture, women are treated like animals. "They are regularly beaten because Maasai men believe women need a beating to learn proper discipline," Simat stresses.

She adds: "More than once my husband beat me up, sometimes so bad forcing me to take refuge at a neighbour's home."

According to Simat, women are beaten for any small thing. "For example, I once received a severe beating because the cows came home late," she recalls.

She notes that women are also traded like cattle, married off to older men, often with many wives at a very young age.

By all odds Simat dared go against community's elders' imagination — holders and executors of Maasai's stool of rule by applying for a chief's position at Narok.

## Duel

Just before that she witnessed a scene that left her perplexed and lost for words: "A woman accused of adultery was being beaten mercilessly and stripped naked by her brothers-in-law while the chief looked on and the man she supposedly had an affair with standing nearby remained untouched," Simat recalls.

Apparently, the woman's husband worked far from home and her brothers-in-law brought the couple to the chief.

"In my culture a woman belongs to the clan, and they had decided it was their duty to 'discipline her'. It was a heart-wrenching experience," Simat says with a tinge of sadness.

The sight of the senseless beating and the bitter cooling effect propelled her to seek for a more influential ground and the being the community's chief was just perfect at that time.

"The position and the powers that come with the seat was strategic for me to fight and protect women against stereotype traditions," she explains.

Not long enough before the awful experience faded away, the position of chief fell vacant. She applied immediately and was invited for an interview breaking men's egos.

## Record

She says most men in the location were shocked that a woman would even think of becoming chief, let alone applying for the job. Several meetings were held after which the men convinced the elders that the only way to stop her unimaginable ambition was to declare a curse on her head.

"A cursing ceremony was convened shortly after but I sabotaged it by appearing at the meeting and shocking the elders to silence," say Simat who is also the Executive Director of Maasai Women for Education and Economic Development (MAWEED) and chairperson of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee.

In the meantime the interview panel decided that part of the interview would be written. Interestingly none of the men had a pen and none of them could write.

"I was the only one who could write," she recalls.

## Resilience

News of her being the next chief of the village started seeping across location like bush fire. "It was even discovered that my appointment letter had indeed been sent out but I never got to see it. Elders had declared that there was never going to be a woman chief in our location," Simat says.

After the heartbreak of failing to secure the position of chief, she went to Narok town and founded Maasai Women for Education and Economic Development (MAWEED), an organisation which fights for the rights of indigenous Maasai women and girls to enjoy fundamental freedoms and rights.

*In my culture a woman belongs to clan and can be disciplined at will."*

— Mary Simat



Simat makes her contribution in a past event. Below: Simat (second right), is the Executive Director of Maasai Women for Education and Economic Development (MAWEED) and the chairperson of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa coordinating committee. Pictures: Robert Wanjala. Pictures: Robert Wanjala

In 1997, she was sponsored by Narok County Council to attend her first international conference, the UN Working Group for Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) in Geneva.

"I was so naïve and 'fresh from the village' that I thought toilets don't fly up with the airplane so I kept visiting the washrooms in the airport because I was afraid that once up there in the sky I may want to visit the toilet and not be able to find one," she says with a tinge of laughter.

## Achievement

During the UNWGIP meeting, Simat was elected the first Africa Gender Representative for the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee. She became vice-chair in 2001, and then in 2003 chairperson, becoming the first woman to ever hold that office.

IPACC is a network comprising 150 indigenous peoples' organisations from 20 African countries. The network unites diverse community-based organisations into an alliance to enable effective advocacy.

During her time as chairperson she fought tooth and nail to preserve indigenous peoples' rights and representation and participated in the adoption of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples.

## Dawn

In October 2010, she embarked on a campaign to familiarise Maasai villagers with the new constitution. She was named among the four Maasai heroes in the county by National



Heritage and Culture Ministry.

"It was like a dream to be seated with high government officials, talking at their level; mind you on national television."

On global scene she remains vocal on preservation of traditional language and good culture. She is using her position to raise awareness of climate change and effects of drought on indigenous peoples.

Simat is very powerful and influential within the UN system. In May 2007, she spoke at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues alongside the other representatives of indigenous peoples' organisations calling for 'recognition and respect' on indigenous peoples in Africa.

"It's not fair that when we simply ask for our rights, we are always seen as being rebellious. We want to maintain our culture and the connection to our indigenous cultures," she says having told the highly powered delegation at the UN.

## Optimistic

Despite the challenges, Simat remains optimistic and see a bright future for the indigenous peoples of Africa.

"Africa is the only continent where indigenous people have organised themselves into groups," she says.

"By uniting together, we can make great strides towards a better future for our people and the indigenous peoples of Kenya may have the most to celebrate: Never before have we been so politically visible," she asserts.

## Lobbying

Simat hopes that the realisation indigenous people's rights will be borne out of persistent lobbying and advocacy that will see a shift in government policy.

"I strongly believe that bureaucracy within organs responsible for articulating the interest of indigenous peoples — national and international — should be re-evaluated to pave the way for dialogue and sustainable engagement with indigenous peoples in policy formulation and implementation processes," she affirms.

Nonetheless, she postulates that it is difficult to reconcile indigenous people's issues in view of communities' heritage and culture. Despite a progressive intensification of calls for indigenous rights there is still much work to be done especially due to civil society organisations' unwillingness to educate indigenous peoples about gender equality.

"I feel confident that the fighting indigenous peoples are undertaking to claim their rights will one day end and we will emerge even stronger," she concludes.



# What stands between the African girl child and education

...By Jennifer Emick

The challenge of addressing the gap in women's leadership and decision-making roles demands a theory of change that is founded upon the notion of inclusivity rather than exclusivity – on the advancement of social justice rather than on economic returns.

It is this theory of change that underpins the work of Akili Dada.

Akili Dada is an international non-profit organization working to empower high-achieving girls from underprivileged backgrounds to become the next generation of African women leaders.

Founded in 2005 by Dr Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg, Akili Dada seeks to diversify the voices of those involved in leadership and policy-making processes across the African continent and beyond.

Akili Dada is strategic investing in Kenya's top performing female scholars from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who have a demonstrated interest in social change. In doing so, we are providing academically gifted and socially-minded young women the opportunity and support they need to succeed as future leaders.

## Constraints

Due to cost constraints and lack of government investment, many bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to attend secondary school across Africa. Akili Dada is, therefore, working to financially bridge the huge gap between primary and university education in Kenya.

They do this by offering a growing number of adolescent girls access to competitive scholarships for high-quality secondary education, personalised mentoring programs and leadership development training.

Utilising a targeted and multifaceted methodology, Akili Dada not only provides comprehensive financial support to high potential female students, but also enhances their educational experience through a service-based leadership training curriculum and individual mentoring with women professionals and Akili Dada alumnae and staff.

The Swahili words 'Akili' and 'Dada' signify the organization's unifying theme of an egalitarian sisterhood that is committed to excellence.

Accordingly, Akili Dada scholars are presented with frequent networking opportunities throughout the year to allow for the exchange of ideas, reflections and best practices.

Major events include a Leadership Training Academy and an Annual Conference, which afford young women the chance to meet and learn from African women leaders such as Atsango Chesoni, Executive Director Kenya Human Rights Commission who was one of the drafters of Kenya's new constitution.

By creating a platform for collaboration among women from different generations, professions, geographies, and social and economic circumstances, Akili Dada effectively functions as



*Young girls from under privileged families in Africa have a new lease to pursue their dreams in education. Akili Dada, an international non profit organization offers scholarships to high achieving girls to become the next generation of African women leaders.*

a leadership incubator for young and aspiring African women. As part of its mission to serve to others, Akili Dada purposefully designed an experiential leadership curriculum that ensures that its scholars remain tied to their communities through the implementation of community service projects.

## Inspiration

Once the young women complete high school, they remain involved as mentors to future 'Dadas'. In this way, Akili Dada nurtures young women in a continuous cycle and transforms them into confident leaders that are committed to driving positive social change in their communities and around the world.

Akili Dada is the realization of Kamau-Rutenberg's vision for an organization that grants educational access and leadership opportunities to underprivileged African women.

Kamau-Rutenberg, herself a recipient of life changing scholarships and meaningful mentoring, understands the powerful impact of these tools.

Her desire to give back to her community and pay it forward to the next generation of girls was her original inspiration for founding Akili Dada.

Since the launch of its first scholarships in 2006, Akili Dada has been on a steep growth trajectory. After doubling its budget in 2008, Akili Dada has managed to triple its funding and increase its number of scholarship recipients each year since.

This rapid growth has garnered international recognition, including from such prestigious entities as the

United Nations, the White House, and the Cecilia Attias Foundation for Women, founded by a former first lady of France.

## Benefits

Our rapid growth has also broadened the organisation's reach, enabling more promising young African women to attain a secondary education and move on to become university students, professionals, mentors and change agents.

One hundred per cent of the young women who have gone through the Akili Dada programme have earned full scholarships to universities in Kenya and abroad, including to the American Ivy League.

They are pursuing studies as diverse as architecture, medicine, computer science, and business. They remain leaders in their communities as well as integral members of the Akili Dada sisterhood. Take Akili Dada scholar Faith, who, even before graduating from high school in December of 2011, was an exemplary leader.

Not only was she a prefect with excellent grades at one of Kenya's top high schools, Faith, working with friends, co-founded AZMA.co.ke, a social network initiative aimed at expanding and coordinating community service efforts among high school students in Kenya.

The network offers a platform to facilitate the exchange of ideas and discussions as well as organizing community service activities, mentoring, and outreach events across the country. Partner organizations Akirachix,

Ushahidi, and the Kuyu Project guided and supported Faith and her co-founders in this effort.

## Momentum

Faith is now an intern at the Akili Dada office, juggling various other responsibilities including participating in the Zawadi Africa program that helps African women from underprivileged backgrounds access top-quality university education in the US.

She continues to mentor the Akili Dada scholars who are still in high school, and is an active participant of Be the Change Kenya, an initiative working towards the eradication of child poverty by strengthening the capacity of local leaders and local organizations.

While this positive momentum on the part of the young women who make up Akili Dada as well as of the organization itself is encouraging, the largest challenge facing Akili Dada is not having sufficient funds to support the many deserving and highly qualified young women who would like to benefit from Akili Dada's leadership program.

Due to the inherent budget constraints of non-profit organizations, only a limited number of scholarships are granted and a limited number of girls and young women are able to directly benefit from the mentoring and leadership training we provide. With a 100 per cent secondary school completion rate and 100 per cent of

the high school graduates going on to university, it is clear that our model works. Further, the growing interest in Akili Dada's mentoring and leadership programs from young women in secondary school and university demonstrates the pressing need for these kinds of opportunities on a much larger scale.

## Aspiration

We hope to be able to grow our own reach as well as facilitate networks of women and organizations working toward similar aims across the African continent.

For Akili Dada and its scholars, the impact of the last seven years has been tremendous. Today, young women that would have otherwise dropped out of school are studying to be lawyers, doctors, architects and engineers.

They are designing innovative community service projects to address local needs and to drive social change. They are serving as mentors to other girls who have faced similar hurdles. They are instilling hope in an entire generation of women. They are shaping the future.

Investing in the education and empowerment of young women is not only an investment in the realization of universal human rights, or in the achievement of substantive human progress.

It is an investment in a brighter future for all.

# Empowering African women through education

...By Jennifer Emick

The United Nations has designated October 11th as the International Day of the Girl Child. With growing cynicism around girls' and women's rights empowerment efforts generally, it is likely that some will opine that the commemoration of this day is overrated.

Thinking as much is to miss the point on its significance entirely. The 21st Century has seen great advances

in women's rights but issues of gender inequality persist. Today, women comprise over 50 per cent of the global population, yet they remain a largely unincorporated demographic.

## Representation

Across the world, women are grossly underrepresented in top leadership positions and in political decision-making processes. Although this trend is changing, disproportionate access to education and institutional biases

against women continue to impede the realisation of universal gender equality.

Formally recognised as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), equitable access to quality education is essential for the realisation of any other social, economic or political right (UNICEF).

In spite of this, one in four children (a total of 32 million primary school-age children) in sub-Saharan Africa are not in school. These amount to nearly 50 per cent of the global out-of-school

population (UNESCO, 2010).

Furthermore, a report generated by UNESCO indicates that out of 17 countries with more than 500,000 out-of-school children, nine are located in sub-Saharan Africa.

Worldwide, primary school completion for both males and females is 90 per cent. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, primary school completion is 91 per cent.

In sub-Saharan Africa, roughly 70 per cent of students complete primary

school. While the gap is narrowing, the statistical disparities indicate that certain parts of Africa still lag behind the global average.

A similar comparison of gross secondary enrolment percentages validates this point, as it shows that the global average stands at 70 per cent, is close to 80 per cent in MENA, while less than 40 per cent of the youth in sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in secondary education.

Continued on page 15



# Women and orphans unable to enjoy the right to inherit land

...By Duncan Mboyah & Jane Godia

Over 52 per cent of Kenya's population are women and 80 per cent of them live in rural areas where they derive their livelihood from agriculture.

Interestingly less than five per cent of women legally own land yet they operate in the land as if they are the custodians.

Even though Kenya's Constitution gives all gender equal rights to own land, women's right to own, inherit and control land is yet to be realised as all the parcel of land they work on are owned by their husbands or male relatives.

Tradition also plays a role here as local village leaders will not support women when it comes to land matters.

"Close relatives, traditional leaders, corrupt government officials and individuals bestowed with powers to protect the needy still believe that women are unable to own titles for parcels of land," said Esther Mwaura-Muiru, National Coordinator Groots Kenya.

## Apathy

Mwaura-Muiru observed that even though the existing legal framework protects women's rights to access, own and inherit land and other properties, this is stifled by low levels of awareness and compliance.

She reveals that death, dissolution and separation of couples further increase women's vulnerability.

"With the HIV and Aids pandemic, the plight of women's land and property rights violation is increasing on a daily basis," said Mwaura-Muiru during the launch of a guide book on access to informal justice for grassroots women.

She added: "This adversely contributes to their security of tenure for land previously occupied by these widows and orphans before the demise of the male head of the household."

Mwaura-Muiru noted that the traditional justice system that have been male dominated make it difficult for the widows and orphans to access justice.

## Action

According to Mwaura-Muiru, this trend is fast changing courtesy of efforts by Groots Kenya that has formed a community land and property watch dog group.

"We have formed watchdog groups in Homa Bay, Busia, Kakamega, Kitui, Nanyuki, Kiambu and Nairobi counties, a move that has helped build capacity of grassroots women," Mwaura-Muiru said.

According to Gerald Omoke, District Officer for Mathare Division in Nairobi cases of disinheriting widows and orphans are on the increase as most of them are brought forward by a few rich people in the society.

"They are disinheriting widows and orphans with knowledge that litigation process always takes a long time to be completed," he observes.

Omoke urged members of the public to be on the look out and help people whose knowledge of land matters are wanting. "Let it be everybody's business to protect human rights and property," said Omoke.

## Empowerment

Assistant chief Paul Wangai from Rumuruti in Nanyuki the issue of women and property is being handled with seriousness in his area.

"The watchdog has acted as a catalyst to sensitise women that they are next in line to inheriting their husband's property."

He urged families to register deaths and births because then it will enable the provincial administration safeguard issues pertaining to women and property in the country.

Groots noted that it had seen transformation to traditional justice systems where men have embraced change and seen the importance of having women in the community watchdog committees.

## Vigilance

She noted that watchdog groups have been effective and have worked to ensure women are not chased from their homes.

Her sentiments were echoed by Violet Shivutse from Bungoma who said that property inheritance is a challenge for widows. However, she noted that mapping of where problems are is done by women who understand the magnitude of the problem.

"Through the watchdog committees, the community has appreciated the importance of having women included in decision making," said Shivutse.

According to Judith Omenge, Registrar of the High Court of Kenya, the Judiciary wants all those who come to court to access justice easily noting that women have challenges to accessing justice.

On that note the Judiciary has embarked on retraining court officials on how to handle women when they appear in a court of law.

"We have formed Court Users Committee whose role is to advice people appearing in court for the first time so that



European Union head of delegation to Kenya Ambassador Lodewijk Briet and Esther Mwaura Muiru (left) the national coordinator of Groots Kenya display a copy of the new Documentary and Community guide book on access to informal justice by Women and their communities on Land, Property and Inheritance Rights. Picture: Jane Godia.

they know how the court operates and also know their rights as enshrined in the constitution," said Omenge.

She noted that women are more vulnerable to injustice because they have many roles that they pursue hence making them lose land cases when in essence they could have won the cases.

"Ignorance of the law makes it difficult for people to access justice," noted Omenge. She added: "The distance to courts has been a barrier to accessing justice and that is why there is a huge need to bring the courts nearer to the people."

## Policy

She noted that the reformed Judiciary has looked at the cost of going to court and is coming up with a pro-poor policy so that people can easily get access to justice. Women and children remain the poorest and are the ones who tire quickly from too many trips to the courts and give up before the cases are decided.

European Union head of delegation to Kenya Ambassador Lodewijk Briet observed that women's rights and land ownership is one thing that requires closer monitoring to ensure that their properties are protected.

"Ownership and distribution of land has been long standing and a bone of contention," Briet said. He added: "Land plays a critical role in the stability and cohesion of a country."

However, Briet noted that the legal uncertainty on women whose property including land is disposed is common yet there exists laws that protect them.

He said that where judicial and legal systems are reliable enough then it is easy to attract investment.

However, he noted with concern: "The fact that only five per cent of women own land and that women own only five per cent of title deeds is a clear trend of poverty."

## Guidebook

He said the guidebook will help women in Kenya create more community watchdog groups.

"The watch dog role through the community involvement must continue since it is the only way that women and poor people can have their property protected from corrupt individuals," he noted.

According to the chairperson National Equality and Gender Commission Winfred Lichuma alternative dispute resolution mechanisms should be in place to save poor people from rural areas into paying large sums of money while pursuing a court case.

"With the help of communities and the aid of paralegals, most cases should be handled at the village level since elders have good knowledge of the genesis of the problem than arbitrating them in a court of law," Lichuma noted.

"We can transform this country through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms," she said.

She appealed to the Chief Justice and the Attorney General to allow paralegals permission to practice to help reduce the backlog of cases that are currently pending in most courts.

## Mechanism

"Para-legalism can be guided with legal mechanism so that it is done in the right way since it's about issues of law," said Lichuma. She reiterated: "The Chief Justice and the Attorney General should go round to have a curriculum for paralegals so that we can use it to impress this country with policy guidelines that will help realise support for the community."

Lichuma noted that the National Equality and Gender Commission has the mandate of giving a voice to the voiceless. "We all need to make gender of the cultural construction of men and women our agenda."

The guide book and the video highlights the positive transformation in the local and traditional governance institutions that has allowed clan elders to respond to widows and orphans with urgency.

It further creates awareness on the importance of acquiring legal documents such as national identity cards, birth certificates, death certificates and land title deeds that are required in succession of property.

## New beginnings in Narok after years of destitution

...By Malachi Motano

Widows, widowers, orphans and other vulnerable people who have been landless for many decades in Trans Nzoia County have been settled in Narok South after acquiring a 7,500-acre piece of land.

These members of Mama na Mtoto Group have for long been volunteering their services by cleaning Kitale town. They have finally acquired the land through savings from their meagre earnings that they have engaged in for the period they have been leading the miserable life.

"We first started contributing KSh20 on a daily basis and later raised it to KSh60 that saw us buy one acre piece of land, enabling us to resettle 10 widows in Birunda area of Trans Nzo-

ia West District," says Wilson Maika, the group chairman.

He says that through their contributions the group managed to raise the KSh4.2 million that enabled them to acquire the land after their members especially the widows contributed and the Government assisted them in identifying the land.

## Unity

Maika observed that after raising the money the group started to liaise with other groups of people in a similar situation. That is how they started working with a Nakuru based Kenya National Organisation for Victims of Ethnic Clashes (KNOVEC) that played a pivotal role in ensuring the group got the land.

The group members left Trans Nzoia in August this year for their abode where they have now started a new life. Each member received a reasonable size of land that shall transform their lives greatly.

According to Maika most members were affected by tribal clashes of 1992 and 1997 that were rekindled by the 2007-2008 post-election violence and have since lived miserable lives that could not enable even their children to access basic education.

According to Judith Wangasa, the group's treasurer, after resettling the ten widows they became motivated and intensified their contributions that saw each of them contribute KSh4,000 hence managing to raise the money that they used to buy the Narok land.

"We have been suffering for a long time as many of us live in rented houses hence we could not afford anything more than some little food after toiling in casual jobs," said Wangasa. She added: "We see this as a true answer to our prayers and we are happy that we are going to have a place we can call our own." Unfortunately, none of the politicians in the area or administrators of all the regimes that have been in power ever thought of solving the plight of the Mama na Mtoto Group hence each of them had to fight tooth and nail to maintain the contributions and now are set to see the returns.

According to the group's officials before landing on the Narok land they had tried to search for land nearer home but could not get. They only managed to get the one in Narok which

they say despite being far from their homeland is the best available option.

## Petition

On arrival they had to survive at any cost as long as each of them was on his or her own piece of land. They are also appealing to the Government and non-governmental organisations among other donors to come in and assist them with tents and other humanitarian assistance as they preparing to put up structures.

However, the exit of the 4000 vulnerable people from Trans Nzoia to Narok County might to some extent have a negative political impact in Trans Nzoia where the 4,000 votes could make a tremendous impact to some of the aspiring politicians.



# Championing for girl child rights

...By Joyce Chimbi

While in Kenya attending a forum convened by the African Women Leaders Network to strategise on ways to improve reproductive health and to broaden the choices therein, Dr Hilda Tadria talked to Kenya Woman on her rewarding journey in empowering young women in Uganda.

Although she left the university many years ago, the saying that once a teacher always a teacher rings true for her. She spoke of her passion to open the eyes of these women to the possibilities of a better life.

Born in 1945 in Uganda, Dr Hilda Tadria is married with two children and six grandchildren. After graduating with her first degree in Sociology, she knew that the career choices she made would involve a conscious interaction with people at very close levels.

By the time she made the choice to pursue Social Anthropology and Women Studies in Cambridge University in the United Kingdom for her doctoral studies, it had become clear to her that she wanted to work towards women's empowerment.

## Experience

For many years, she lectured at Makerere University in Uganda, during her time there, students came from all over Africa to study at this prestigious institution. It is here where the best of the best honed their skills. It is also here that Kenya's President Kibaki had a stint in teaching before leaving the profession for politics.

While in Makerere, Tadria had an opportunity to interact with young people closely and to begin to understand some of the pressing issues that they had to deal with beyond the lecture halls. Issues that nonetheless had a lasting impact on their academic lives.

## Reality

However, it was not until she left the university as an associate Professor to work for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) that she came face to face with the problems women faced.

"It is while in UNECA that I began to really understand some of the root problems facing women across Africa. My work was to receive report from many African countries and to summarise the reports into one.

"I realised that most women movements had died. I also realised that they died because the membership was largely constituted of older women. Where were the young women? I wondered," Tadria explains.

## Inspiration

The passion for her to work with young women grew and upon her retirement from UNECA in 2007 where she had worked for ten years, she began a programme that would show girls from all walks of life that there is a better world, and they can have it better.

"Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women is now four years old. Through this programme, I talk to girls about sexuality and sexual violence, about career planning and better performance in school," she says.

As an entry point, Tadria realised early enough, perhaps the teacher in her, that better performance in school had an intricate relationship with issues of sex and sexuality.

Moving from school to school, specifically in secondary school where her target group is, she too had a lot to learn from these girls.

"A majority of these girls between the ages of 14 and 20 who are in secondary schools are in relationships, many living under very difficult and challenging circumstances," she says.

In most instances, they have told her that there cannot be love without sex.

"Times have really changed, this is a 14-year-old, who is already aware of the intricacies of a sexual relationship," she says pensively.

## Impact

Consequently, in their naivety, they will believe all sorts of stories. Some are told that if they are having sex for the first time, or in certain positions, that they cannot get pregnant. Then they get pregnant, and have to drop out of school. "Very few of them, if at all, understand the link between sex, pregnancy and dropping out of school," she says.



*Dr Hilda Tadria begins a program to mentor and empower young women in Africa. She is a strong crusader of their rights and has been instrumental in addressing the myriad challenges facing them.*

In addition to living under very trying circumstances, some know nothing better.

"Two years ago we visited a school in a rural area, when we asked the girls what they were aspiring for, in regard to their future, they all said that they wanted to get married to a good man and have a big house," she says.

After her encounter with these girls and the ensuing discussions, they had a very different picture of the kind of future they would like to have.

Although there are very successful stories "such as the one where we visited a school. We explained to the head teacher what we are all about. The teacher said that for 25 years they had not had a single student achieve a first grade in senior year.

"After we had rolled out our mentorship programme, the school managed to score not one,

but two first grades in 25 years. These are the stories that keep me going, that keep us going since I don't do it alone."

But then there are painful stories of when girls who are themselves babies are sexually abused and even impregnated.

"There is the story of a 16-year-old, when I first saw her pregnant I was moved to tears. She was raped. Fortunately, we have been able to put her back in school, she and her baby are doing well," she says.

## Prejudices

Challenges facing the African girl child are many. Unlike the boy child, culture does not offer her as many opportunities as it does the boy child.

Neither does culture cushion her. It is for this reason that Tadria continues to work with girls in rural areas, urban slums among other areas. Although these girls may have unique challenges due to their circumstances, when it comes to sexuality and their empowerment, the issues are cross cutting.

## Report

Tadria recalls a report she once read of a study that had been conducted in Makerere University where female students were asked what they wanted the most from the university.

"Very few chose passing well as their first priority. Only about 24 per cent of them. Then we had violence in the university, of boyfriends beating their girlfriends, dictating when they should go to class.

"During our times that was unheard of. He hit you, you dropped him. You didn't miss classes because you were cooking and washing for him while he attended classes, he treated you right and took you out," she recalls.

It is for these reasons that Tadria does what she does, with no salary or allowance, she raises funds to help the organisation move from one school to another.

Every day she continues to connect the dots towards creating a strong movement for young girls. These are girls who know what is best for them, who are assertive. These are girls who are not too intimidated to dream and more importantly are able to pursue their dreams.

# Garissa warming up to family planning

...By Mowlid Mohamed

Family planning issues are considered a taboo topic in Garissa county due to fear of stigmatization by the community.

Most people believe that family planning is against the basic tenets of the religion of Islam which is predominant in the area.

However, there are exceptions such as Aisha Mohammed, a mother of seven and others who may be using contraceptives discretely, the culture of silence, myths and misconceptions around family planning may have well been broken.

Aisha is using contraceptives but gives her reasons as being health related. A mother of seven, she was advised against the dangers of more births. Further, her last child was delivered through the caesarean section, a surgical procedure that comes with increased risk.

## Rights

Despite the eminent backlash from the conservative Somali community, Aisha has made up her mind to exercise her right to decide whether and when to have an eighth child, if at all.

She vividly recalls how the society critically judged her decision when she went public with the idea of family planning. This strong reaction initially discouraged her from sharing information on family planning with her close

friends.

"You'll be divorced if you dare do family planning" was what welcomed Aisha upon sharing her side of the story with the society.

In Garissa, convincing men to embrace family planning is an uphill task in spite of the known fact that more and more Islamic states are embracing the practice.

## Challenges

After her last delivery, Aisha opted to use the long term method of birth regulation for a period of five years. She recalls that it was not easy convincing her husband that family planning was the best option for them.

However, this method had its drawbacks. To her dismay, Aisha experienced a series of back pains and unpredictable bleeding as a result of the implant.

"I made up my mind to remove the implant some three months to time as I feared forgetting it being in my body and causing more complications," Aisha explains.

Stigmatization of those who engage in family planning in the Somali community is mainly attributed to the culture based on the Islamic religion that most believe does not recommend the practice.

Zahra Hashi, a practicing gynaecologist at Simaho Health Centre in Garissa County points out that due to the practice being regarded as a taboo in the region, they have been forced to

substitute it with the term "child spacing" so that potential clients can feel free to come.

Hashi says: "The women prefer the implant or Depo Provera injection to the pills for fear of being seen with the tablets as this could result to violence or divorce by husbands whose consent was not sort."

She notes that women do not want to involve their husbands as the topic is hardly open for discussion.

Numerous women we talked to who are practicing family planning refused to share their story and said that they do so discretely.

## Intervention

Hashi says that on Mondays and Fridays the centre holds health talks mainly related to family planning. She notes that women who come for advice secretly dash into the doctor's room like a bat from hell and hurriedly speak to the doctor while confirming their dates. They do not want to be seen by others.

The intrauterine contraceptive device (popularly known as IUD or coil) which is a device inserted into the uterine cavity and left for varying periods of time for the purpose of contraception cannot be reliably used due to the practice of polygamy by the pastoralist community as sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) and pelvic inflammatory disease can be transmitted easily if either of the wives is infected. The doctor cited this as an impediment.

"Many women wish to practice family planning but fear their husbands' wrath as men relate it with infidelity," says Aisha. She adds: "Husbands take pride in the more wives they marry and jump to the conclusion that women do the practice when they do not intend to give birth again."

## Constraints

Besides culture, there are other impediments to family planning practice in the region. Hashi says staff retention is a big challenge facing the centre as they invest a lot in training nurses on family planning but medics do not stay long before moving to greener pastures where they are relatively paid higher salaries.

The gynaecologist who is also the programme manager at the centre says that they are also facing financial constraints as donors cannot afford to keep on training nurses who after a while find their way elsewhere.

Nonetheless, family planning practice is being promoted at a few health centres in the region with the intent of helping people dispel misconceptions around this issue. This has yielded some fruit as more and more women are now warming up to the practice.

Fatuma Mohamed, a 28 year old mother of three has also had a go at family planning by using the injection for about six months.

Fatuma opted for the injection as opposed to the pill which she thought

she would forget to take.

"I categorically decided to do so in a bid to give myself room to bring up my three children before getting pregnant again," says Fatuma.

## Rationale

Sheikh Ibrahim Idle, a renowned scholar in Garissa County says implementation of the practice depends on the reasons for its use and this makes it to be either forbidden or recommended.

Ibrahim absolutely clarifies that if the woman is engaging in family planning out of the fear of not providing for the children, then it is automatically prohibited.

"Al razaq (the provider) has taken the responsibility to provide for us all and it is against the fundamental teachings of Islam for anyone to refute this," says Ibrahim.

He notes that if the practice is done considering the mother may have problems if she gets pregnant while still having a small child then she is allowed to do family planning.

Lack of awareness among the society has been cited as the main challenge facing the practice, a state that makes difficult for it to be embraced warmly at the first mention.

Above all, local religious scholars and health officers need to join hands in creating awareness around family planning and child spacing so that the image with which the practice is currently viewed in the region can change.



# Dr Hanuni Sogora

## Championing reproductive health and family planning

...By Joyce Chimbi

She started small, doing what she could do in maternity wards. Soon she realised that this was not enough. To save the lives of thousands of women and children, she had to reach out to others with a burning passion for women and children well fare. Having worked in the Ministry of Health in Zanzibar for many years, this remarkable woman has continued to change the lives of many, and she is not ready to throw in the towels, after all, there is still much more to be achieved.

Dr Hanuni Sogora was born in 1948 in Zanzibar, Tanzania. No one, not even her parents, who, like many other parents have big dreams for their children could have foreseen what a force she would become in the lives of thousands of women and children.

Yet, the soft spoken wife, mother to five children and grandmother to six has achieved way beyond her imagination.

"But this is not to say that the work is finished," she is quick to correct.

She was speaking at African Women Leaders Network forum in Nairobi held to strategize on ways to continuing improving access to sexuality and reproductive health and rights in the continent.

### Inspiration

It all begun in 1991 when Sogora decided to specialise in public health and family planning. Being in the medical fraternity, she saw the challenges that women faced just to bring a new life into the world.

"And challenges were not just about women, or mothers, but the children that were born as well. Most did not live beyond their fifth birthday," she interjects.

As a medical doctor in a maternity ward, which was her first landing immediately after graduation, Sogora knew that women deserved to give

birth in better circumstances and also to the number of children they desired.

"The women I saw didn't have these choices, they gave birth often, without spacing, this often led to complications, in some cases the outcome was regrettably fatal," she explains.

### Determination

Sogora is all too aware of the challenges that these women must have faced, living in abject poverty, the women she saw knew of no better world.

Armed with nothing more than knowledge and passion for a better life for these women, their children and families, Sogora embarked on a journey that has made her one of the most recognised voices in reproductive and child health issues.

"Of course the issues that women face have been much more complex than this. We are also talking about women with multiple pregnancies and or are carrying an additional pregnancy that they do not want," Sogora explains.

She adds: "The choices that they ultimately make to terminate these pregnancies and the ensuing abortions that lead to complications and even death have been challenging."

Indeed there are many reasons that lead women to these circumstances and Sogora says lack of information and poverty are some of the precipitating factors.

"Contrary to misconceptions in some quarters, family planning is not just about women. It is about the wellbeing of women since we know that too many births that are also not well spaced is not good for a mother," observes Sogora.

***"In July this year, the President of Zanzibar issued a directive that every woman will give birth free of charge, regardless of whether it is a natural delivery or a caesarean section."***

— Dr Hanuni Sogora

serves Sogora.

"It is also about the wellbeing of the children involved, since often, children dying under the age of five is often as a result of preventable causes such as malnutrition. It is, therefore, about the wellbeing of the entire family and the nation at large," she observes.

Sogora explains that it is the goal of every nation to improve the lives of its people. How can this happen when people are raising more children than they can feed and even educate.

"Family planning is good for development, both economic and human development. The kind of development that we should envision is that which puts the interests, concerns and wellbeing of its people above all else," she explains.

### Achievement

While she talks, her face brightens as the discussions wades into some of the achievements that her efforts and those of likeminded stakeholders have achieved.

"In July this year, the President of Zanzibar issued a directive that every woman will give birth free of charge, whether in natural delivery or through caesarean," she says.

This is bound to have significant positive outcomes since a caesarean section costs between KSh40,000 to KSh100,000. In some of the high profile private hospitals it can cost as much as KSh200,000. This move that is bound to benefit pregnant women who may develop complications.

It is also going to draw women out of their homes where they give birth



*Dr Hanuni Sogora, a champion of reproductive health and family planning in Zanzibar recounts her experience during the Africa Women Leaders Network forum in Nairobi*

under the care of their mother in laws and other female friends who know no better than these women about child birth and the risky complications that could arise.

Zanzibar is also one of those countries that is leading by example.

According to Zanzibar's Demographic Health and Survey, the country might well achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) to improve maternal health by primarily reducing maternal deaths by three quarters.

In 2006, for every 100,000 women that gave birth in this island country, 473 of them died. The numbers dropped to 284 in 2011 and the goal is to have them drop to about 170 by 2013 if not lower. Sogora is quick to explain that it has taken a lot of work, lobbying and partnerships, in order to get this country to this point.

### Religion

In a country that is predominantly Muslim speaking openly about the intricacies of reproductive health and particularly family planning has not been easy. "Raising awareness and working closely with religious leaders has made it clear to a good number of people that our teachings do not go against what is in our religious teachings," she says.

"How can the concept of raising healthy families, advocating for the rights of children as well as women

be said to go against religion?" Sogora poses.

Although over the years their campaigns and advocacy work has gained tremendous support from religious leaders, there are still pockets of resistance.

Further, the unmet need for contraceptives remains high at 34 per cent. These are women who would like to use contraceptives but have no access to it.

Contraceptive use is also low at 12 per cent, an indication that a lot of ground is yet to be covered since there is an intricate relationship between contraceptive prevalence and maternal health.

"One of the main reasons why there are fewer women than desired on contraceptives is due to the shortage of skilled health providers to offer family planning particularly the long term and permanent methods," she says.

Nonetheless, the challenges do not daunt her. In fact, Sogora is still working towards a "society where women have access to reproductive health services, for their health, their children, families and the nation".

"I would really like to see that women have access to these reproductive health services, that maternal and child mortality continues to decrease and that we attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to improve maternal and child health," she concludes.

## The road to a new Constitution for Tanzanians is being paved

...By Issa Yusuf

They now have two months to share their views either in person or in writing on what they would like to see carved in stone in the new mother of all laws. Constitution Review Commission (CRC) in the new constitution for the United Republic of Tanzania.

But critics say it is unfortunate that Zanzibar residents are yet to give their views on union and basic human rights issues.

But Asha Makame, Chama Cha Mapinduzi official has suggested that a clause be included in the new Constitution to bar men from denying their wives opportunity to secure employment.

Presenting her views to the CRC forum in Zanzibar, Makame lamented that despite the fact that women had a heavy burden in the family; it is unfortunate that some men refuse their wives from securing employment even when the husband's earning could not sustain their family needs.

"Women need additional opportunities in major decision bodies such as Parliament, and if possible half of the positions should be allocated to women," said Makame as she called for narrowing of social and political gap between men and women.

### Constitution

The CCM official said the new Constitution should benefit women more by giving them equal rights in property ownership, privileges in marriage, and protect them and

children against abuse.

It should also ensure that parental responsibility is shared between both parents, and eliminate gender discrimination in relation to land and property in addition to maintaining a balanced gender ratio in elective bodies.

Makame told the public forum that gender equality should also be embraced in the supreme law by political parties by providing basic requirements for political parties to respect and promote.

"It should also ensure that wom-

en and men have the right to equal treatment and opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres without discrimination," the official says. But as Makame and other Tanzanians continue to give views and propose what they feel should be in the next Constitution, most Zanzibar is took a back seat. Even in the recent CRC forum for the Members of Zanzibar House of Representatives, many issues were untouched by most legislators, probably because the spice island has its own Constitution.



# Women in Tarime strive to sit at the peace negotiation table

...By Noor Shija

Despite efforts made by politicians, religious leaders, government officials and clan elders to restore peace and harmony in Tarime District, Mara region, nothing much seems to come through.

Recently, it was discovered that besides the peace process moving at a snail's pace, the women in this area, although a critical stakeholder, are not involved in the peace building process.

In Mara region, especially Tarime and Royra districts, whenever there is conflict between two tribes, those who suffer most are the women and children.

## Statistics

Reports on the violence show that between 2001 and 2009 about 136 people were killed, 336 were injured and some 2,421 homes destroyed in the districts.

In response to the violence, the Government has set-up a police unit in the affected areas to ensure lasting peace. However, this seems not be working effectively. Women are absent from the initiatives being sought to bring about this peace.

Conflict experts say what needs to be done is for the Government to ensure the main sources of conflict which include water, animals and land are addressed adequately by involving all the stakeholders, especially women.

## Scarcity

The main cause of fighting is the struggle for pasture and cattle rustling, which has made the two districts a living nightmare.

The Anglican Diocese of Tarime, which most of the time offers refuge to women and children, blames secularism for the violence. It says less than 10 per cent of the population of over 360,000 are Christians.

"Many children in Tarime are growing up within families and communities that do not know God and have no love for the neighbours," the

church says.

Rosemary Kasimbi Kirigiti, a Member of Parliament from Mara says the situation is very serious because women are not given the opportunity to share concerns and proposals on how to manage the conflict.

"Many of the peace processes and agreements made in the past do not involve the opinions of women. The main players are government officials and male clan elders," notes Kirigiti.

She adds that while the women play a greater role in tending the very resources the men fight over, they are never considered important when it comes to discussing how the resources should be shared.

Another Member of Parliament in Mara Region, Esther Bulaya says there is need to enlighten and educate the women on their rights.

## Change

However, she is optimistic that things will change once the new generation brings on board other stakeholders which have been marginalised by the older generation.

Global trends and technology are also making a positive impact. "In Tarime women have started talking about their rights as they see and hear what women in other areas in and outside of Tanzania are doing," notes Bulaya.

She adds: "To make women more aware of their rights the Ministry of Social Development, Gender and Children has been going around the Mara region educating women about their rights."

According to Amina Nassoro Makilagi who is a Member of Par-

***"More women in Tarime and Royra Districts are taking up leadership positions such as chairperson of a village committee, something that never happened before."***

— Amina Nassoro



**Hard work: Women in Tarime carry wares across a flooded river. Women in this area have been marginalized and are involved in peace building processes despite bearing the highest brunt.**

liament, things are going to change for better because women are finding their way into these processes. "More women in these districts are taking up leadership positions such as chairperson of a village committee, something that never happened in the past," she says.

Slowly, women are being considered in some decision-making processes at the family and clan level.

## Education

The women leaders in the area attribute this progress to the education sessions offered in public places and conferences.

Recently, when inaugurating the new Diocese of Tarime Anglican Church, President Jakaya Kikwete assured the area residents that his government will combat criminal acts without any fear or favour.

"It is very surprising and shameful that with 49 years of independence there is still insecurity problems in Tarime. I would like to assure you that the police force will continue to deal with criminal acts without fear or bias," said Kikwete.

However, many are sceptical and are waiting to see how government's peace initiatives or security details will be gender sensitive.

Other leaders from the area, while

talking about peace, rarely mention the role or involvement of women.

## Peace

"Even before elections, I was working closely with district officials and elders to persuade the people of Tarime to avoid skirmishes and that move has played a crucial role in restoring peace in the violent areas," says Nyambari Nyangwine, Member of Parliament Tarime Constituency.

According to Nyangwine, to ensure peace prevails in his constituency, the Government is planning to provide access to safe and clean water and to end cattle rustling that is the main cause of the conflict. Nothing is said about the women and children, who despite being marginalised are finding their way into the peace process.

# Empowering African women through education

Continued from page 11

Disaggregating these numbers by gender reveals that women are disproportionately excluded from the educational system. On the African continent, females have the lowest scores for educational attainment in the world, and are increasingly under-represented continuing up the educational ladder.

In Kenya, for example, the net enrolment ratio for secondary school participation indicates that 51 per cent of males and 48 per cent of females were enrolled in 2010. At the tertiary level, the numbers become much more discouraging.

According to a World Bank estimate, females make up only 37 per cent of those enrolled in Kenya's tertiary education.

While the factors affecting girls' participation in education are numerous and varied, studies on this issue have attributed the persistent gender gap in school enrolment and retention to a number of cultural, environmental and socio-economic factors.

In particular, the costs associated with education prohibit many academically gifted, economically disadvantaged students from attaining high quality schooling.

Additional barriers to female education include early forced marriage, high rates of teenage pregnancy, gender discrimination, domestic obligations, sexual harassment, health issues (such as HIV and malaria), and a lack of role models and self-esteem.

## Inequalities

Due to the myriad obstacles to girls' education, African women remain underrepresented in leadership roles and decision-making across all sectors with a few exceptions. In Kenya, women constitute a mere 0.5 per cent of top management in government ministries, 10 per cent of the National Assembly, 10 per cent of top management in local government and 14 per cent of the diplomatic corps.

According to UNIFEM (now UN Women) women make up 37 per cent of the total labour force in state corpora-

tions, with only 1.3 per cent of women at management levels.

Economically speaking, the average monthly income of a Kenyan woman is about two-thirds that of a Kenyan man (Post, 2011). As these facts demonstrate, gender inequalities, particularly women's lack of education, have broad implications for African societies.

Numerous studies have called attention to the economic impact of investing in girls' education, emphasizing that each one per cent increase in the share of females with a secondary education generates 0.3 per cent in per capita income growth (World Bank, 2010).

## Research

Additional research has indicated that girls' wages can go up by 20 per cent for every year of education past the fourth grade.

Educated women are on average more likely to marry later and have smaller families — approximately 3.9 children per woman rather than

the average 5.3 for a woman without secondary education (World Bank, 2010).

A study undertaken by the Nike Foundation estimated that adolescent pregnancy costs Kenya's economy \$500 million per year, whereas investing in girls' education has the potential to add \$3.2 billion (roughly a third of Kenya's GDP) to the country's economy (Nike Foundation, 2009).

## Intervention

While these studies are extremely important with regard to the economic development of a country, it is equally if not more important to address education as an inalienable and universal human right.

Through a human rights lens, it is clear that women deserve a quality education, not because it will yield high dividends, but because it is their basic human right. As the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states:

"Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means

of realizing other rights... it is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities."

A similarly compelling argument for viewing girls' education through a human rights lens is delivered by Kavita Ramdas, a long-time advocate of women's human rights and the current Executive Director of the Program on Social Entrepreneurship at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University.

Ramdas states: "It is important to remember that although education brings with it many benefits for girls and the women they grow to be, it is not a magic bullet. It is not the solution to the pressing and interlinked problems of climate change and population growth. High levels of education for girls and women in high-income levels can coexist with stubborn structural gender inequality, as is the case in Saudi Arabia and Japan."



# Sex for food becomes the currency at refugee camp

...By Jans Atieno

At the Kakuma Refugee Camp, women talk in whispers, contemplating their current predicament. Their children line up at the various water points to collect the precious commodity.

Only the most resilient go 'home' with the precious commodity as the push and shove takes its toll on the weak and starving.

Nonetheless, the push and shove is a common feature at the refugee camps where only the fittest survive and the meek merely exist.

Aware of this situation, women and young girls have invented a way of survival; using their bodies to get what they want irrespective of the indignity that they subject themselves to.

## Vulnerable

The oldest profession on earth is no stranger to Kakuma Refugee Camp. The hostile conditions, powerlessness and dependency of refugee encampment expose women to special risk.

Sex comes in handy in such cases as women struggle to get what can sustain them for two weeks when they will get a chance to get another ration of food from the agencies.

"I am a single mother. I stay with my five children, and one was killed. Now that I have no job and nobody can help me with money to buy food for my children, the only alternative is to engage in sex work," says Rukia Galgalo, a Somali single mother.

## Survival

She is not the only one. Hawa Dadache, a 19 year old Somali girl who fled civil war in her country is one such woman who has mastered the art of survival using her body.

Hawa says life in the camp is too tough for the refugees especially women and young girls who have less option for alternative means on income.

"The boys they have small jobs that they can get extra cash to survive but for girls we have more needs and less income so we are forced to use men to make us survive and since no man will give you anything for free we end up having sex with them," explains Hawa.

The women say that poverty forces them to engage in sex as they have no any other way of supplementing their income.

"I did not choose to do sex work for a living. If I can get an income to satisfy my children and my needs, why should I

continue to bear the branding by other women in the community that I snatch their husbands?" poses a Burundian mother.

One woman openly admits of her activity to earn a living. "I have to sell what I have. It is my body because other people sell their goods and others work in the NGOs."

Most commercial sex workers in Kakuma are single mothers who lost their husbands during war and conflict in their own countries.

## Dilemma

They say that it is not safe for them to return to their home countries but life in the camp is also challenging. Although refugees receive food rations every fortnight, they report that it is not sufficient.

"The food and firewood we get cannot last you to the next ration. Where is balanced diet, clothes or even cosmetics?" poses one woman. She adds: "Other refugees working with NGOs can buy these commodities. Our bodies too need these foods that are not distributed by WFP and our children are suffering."

## Clientele

According to Hawa, their clients consist of NGO workers, refugees and locals who treat them to goodies according to their social class.

Although their engagement is not permanent, they tend to keep men for sustainability until when the men get on to other women.

"Women here depend on men to supplement their food ration and even money to buy other things, no woman is attached to one man and our affair is that we can always seek help from them in exchange of sex, the only thing we have," says Hawa as she stacks firewood to her boiling food in Kakuma Three Camp.

The sex for food business is rampant at the refugee camps especially among the size one family who get what cannot sustain them for the whole two weeks based on economy of scales.

Hawa reveals that she has multiple partners who support her in one way or another and they range from aid workers, community heads and fellow refugees.

However, she is not alone in this culture which she has been forced to practice against her own wish.

With close to 170,000 residents, Kakuma is bursting with activity. The local trading centres are busy hubs for small business owners and truck drivers delivering trade goods, food and other humanitarian com-



Most refugee camps are in deplorable conditions where only the fittest survive. Women openly trade their bodies for sex in exchange of favours.

modities.

"Many of our customers are people who drive these trucks that bring goods here from the other urban centres. We also get clients from the villages around here," says Maria Waliya, a resident of Kakuma.

Like most of the residents of Kakuma, Waliya is a refugee who escaped conflict in her native Somalia two years ago. Her sex work is kept very secret and only her friends know how she survives.

## Options

According to George Omondi, Social Community Service and Development Officer at Lutheran World Foundation (LWF) and his colleague Rose Kirimi who is a Gender and Human Rights Officer female headed households look for alternative ways to get food when their ration does not last.

According to Kirimi young girls aren't spared in this as they are pushed by their relatives to have sex with well to do men in exchange of food and other commodities that they need to use in the family.

"We know of cases where women solicit for food with their bodies and according to our investigation it all boils down to the harsh life that is not favouring them," explains Kirimi.

She says girls and women

have little to do to sustain them economically and so opt for the easy way, which in most cases involve sexual intercourse.

"Because of their extra requirement women will be taken advantage of by men who have means to take care of them," says Kirimi.

## Degrading

However, she laments of lost dignity and erosion of the social fabric in the camps since there is no privacy on who is going out with whom and sometimes they quarrel over men.

"A situation where a mother pushes her child to other men in exchange of goodies is very embarrassing especially among her peers but since that is normal to them, no law can compel us to intervene unless in cases involving minors," says Kirimi.

New arrivals at the camps are also scrambled upon by the men in the camp and at times in front of her children.

He cites a situation where men wait for new arrivals in the camp and fight for them especially those who come alone without their husbands.

The drive for sex and the exchange of food for sex in the

camp is high that authorities are getting worried and have therefore arranged for income generating activities targeting girls to supplement their income.

## Statistics

According to Omondi about 60 per cent of the young girls are vulnerable to sex in exchange of basic needs.

A 2010 HIV behavioural survey conducted by the UN Refugee Agency and the Inter Governmental Authority on Development in Kakuma reveals that 23 percent of sexually active respondents reported transactional sex for money, gifts or favours.

It is difficult to know how many people are engaged in the activity since it is done secretly over a mutual understanding among the parties involved.

However, Omondi says the situation is rampant and they only get to know about them when there is a disagreement among the parties and it escalates to the public.

According to Peter Karanja, Assistant Programme Officer at the United Nation High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), they have started income generating activities to alleviate women's vulnerability in the camp.

"We empower them economically through offering education, catering services, whereby they use some capital and we pay back together with interest," he says.

Apart from catering services

we also offer them alternative livelihoods through agriculture, small foods kiosks, peanut butter production, poetry, tailoring, and selling soft drinks," explains Karanja.

Alternative livelihood programmes are meant to assist behaviour change among vulnerable women, including those who exchange food for sex, women living with HIV, illicit brewers and single mothers with large families.

## Intervention

He says that so far they have established over 89 groups comprising of men and women who deal in agricultural produce.

However, Guy Avognon UNHCR head of substation at Kakuma Refugee Camps says a lot needs to be done to contain the situation.

"In an area where there is nil job opportunity, people tend look for other means of survival some find opportunity but some opt for other ways of survival including giving out their bodies to have food," says Avognon.

Avognon concludes that only lasting peace can liberate refugee from their suffering that force them to have sex in exchange of food otherwise advocacy will only reduce but will not eliminate such vices.

Call it sex for food but to the poor women hacking a living in the camp where they are protected from civil war back home, it is survival for the fittest.

***The food and firewood we get cannot last you to the next ration. Where is balanced diet, clothes or even cosmetics."***

— Poses a refugee



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