

Unfiltered, uninhibited... just the gruesome truth

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REJECT

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Guard your tongue

The smallest body part key to peaceful elections

By ROBERT WANJALA

Women peace actors have pledged to drive the peace agenda ahead of the March 4 General Election. Speaking during a media and grassroots women forum in Eldoret, women shared their real experiences in pursuing community cohesion and integration.

According to Beatrice Kimani, a women's leader from Burnt Forest, women have a role to play in conflict mitigation and peace building.

Kimani moved the participants by recounting how some women have averted possible violence and conflict by using the power of their tongue.

Using an adage depicting women as just powerful as men, Kimani said: "When God asked man what he wanted, man said

he wanted strong biceps and when the same was asked of the woman, she answered God that she wanted a powerful tongue."

This loosely translated means that women have their power bestowed to the tongue which they can use to build peace and mitigate conflict.

The tongue illustration set the discussion a notch higher allowing women to share freely how they could use it to build and preach peace ahead of the polls next month.

Biblically, the tongue is described as... "A little member and boasts great things. See how a great forest a little fire kindles. ...the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature.... but no man (human being) can

tame the tongue. It's unruly evil, full of deadly poison..." (Bible James 3:5-8).

The tongue, participants resolved, was critical for development and should be fronted by women who are the greatest victims in case of violence.

"Women and children are the most vulnerable groups whenever there is a conflict or violence. Since we are always the victims let us play the leading role, use our tongue to champion for peace and integration during and after the general election," reiterated Kimani.

Kimani was addressing the forum organised by Africa Woman and Child Feature Services under the Peace Initiative Kenya (PIK) project. The project is encouraging a non-violent electioneering period and end

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From Top: A building depicting the growth in business in Uasin Gishu County. Ann Kandie next to her herd of sheep. Uasin Gishu County governor aspirant Vesca Kangogo sitting next a PEV victim in Yamumbi IDP camp. Esther Chelula in her eatery joint. She hopes the upcoming election will be free from violence.

Pictures: Robert Wanjala

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Reject writer emerges top at Tupange Awards

By MERCY MUMO

Diana Wanyonyi emerged top at the National Council of Population and Development – Tupange Awards, a Media Awards competition held earlier in the month at Baobab Beach Resort in Mombasa.

“I was feted the best after my feature story entitled *Utapia mlo yachangia maafa ya watoto chini ya miaka mitano mkoani Pwani* Under Family Planning category 2012 was aired in Baraka FM news in July last year,” she noted.

In November last year, the same feature was published in issue 073 of the *Reject* newspaper, a bi-monthly online publication of the Media Diversity Centre entitled “*Malnutrition linked to high infant mortality in Coast region*”

The story focused on the statistics from Kinango and Ganze districts which according to Kenya Demographic and Health survey 2008 / 09 statistics, 71 out of 1000 live births die before the age of one.

In Coast 87, infants under the age of five per 1,000 die an indicator, which is almost equal to the national rate of 84. Infant mortality rate which is higher than the national rate of 59.

The story was feted as a well researched, balanced and comprehensive feature of the year.

“I appreciate AWC staff for supporting me endlessly for their productive workshops that have enabled me to cover unique stories and for publishing my features. Barikiweni sana,” said Diana.

She also acknowledged the Kenya Media Programme (KMP) for giving her the travel grant that supported her in covering the health feature last year.



Diana Wanyonyi holding her trophy after emerging top at Tupange Awards. Inset: a copy of the page with her story. Picture: Diana Wanyonyi



Fear of landslides looms in Nyeri County

By ALLAN MURIMI

The provincial administration wants residents living on the edge of a cliff in Nyeri County to relocate saying the area is too dangerous and could be prone to landslides.

Mukurweini District Commissioner Isaac Masinde said the residents are risking their lives by living close to the cliff that came about after a construction company excavated murrum from a quarry.

“We want the people to be safe because it is very dangerous especially for those living on top of the cliff and they must move elsewhere,” advised Masinde.

He noted that Kigathi and Kanjwiri villages were affected by the excavation adding that they will have to negotiate with the company on terms of compensation.

Rehabilitation

The National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) ordered Put Sarajevo Construction Company to rehabilitate the quarry where it had been excavating murrum without conducting an Environment Impact Assessment (EAI) in November last year. NEMA Central region director Stephen Njoka ordered the company to rehabilitate the quarry and compensate farmers whose land would be encroached in the benching.

“Another condition was that there would be no further excavations as this will undermine the cliff which is steep and might collapse,” Njoka told the Reject. A meeting between the company, NEMA, provincial administration, county council and provincial geologists agreed that farmers should be compensated if benching eats into their

land.

The company was told to talk to the villagers and compensate them in the operation that will be supervised by the central region geologist, NEMA and provincial administration.

The company approached the farmers and told them that it would compensate them with KSh50,000 for the pieces of land arguing that it had not encroached on a big portion. The farmers, however, refused to take the offer and asked the company to buy them a piece of land elsewhere so that they could relocate. The provincial administration said it could not interfere in the matter and was waiting for the farmers and the company to resolve the stalemate.

Compensation

“We are waiting for the two parties to come to an agreement as the Government does not plan to compensate the farmers,” said Masinde.

According to Stephen Maina, an area resident, villagers were afraid that a major landslide would pose a great danger to pupils at Kigathi Primary School which lies below the quarry. NEMA also ordered the company to introduce soil at the base of the benches and plant vegetation.

The company was also required to restore an access road that had been damaged by the excavation and look for ways to channel run off water safely to the nearest water way. There have been several landslides in the area and villagers fear their lives could be lost if the murrum excavations continue.

The District Environment Management Authority had discussed and then allowed the Put Sarajevo Construction Company to use any murrum that could be realised in the rehabilitation process.

Street gang poses threat to security in Nakuru

By JOHN MAINA

Nakuru town has of late seen an increased number of street families and especially the boys. This has left women in the town to be fearful of their security.

The most affected are those using the semi-fenced land surrounding the perimeter wall of Afraha Stadium which has now turned to be a haven of rapists, muggers and other sort of crimes.

In the past month alone, at least three women, one of them a school girl have been sexually assaulted, reportedly by a gang that operates behind the “Russia” side of the stadium at night.

Posing as homeless people, the street boys light bonfires to keep them warm at night and this is where they sleep. The gang has now taken to accosting passersby from as early as 8.00 pm.

Assaults

Traders operating nearby say that the area is no longer safe because even people coming late from work are assaulted and robbed of their valuables.

“Operating businesses in the evenings especially after 7.00 pm is proving a challenge for one is risking a rape or an attack by the group,” said one woman who operates a business along Afraha Road. She said the street boys had already turned the area into their home.

She noted that identity cards of women who had been assaulted were placed at a nearby post. “People operating around the

area said that the IDs had been collected at the field, a clear indication that the area is not a safe place once darkness sets in.”

People operating business along the area and those living close by said they had complained to the security department severally. However, Nakuru police boss Bernard Kioko said he was not aware of such incidences.

Light

“We have complained to the security department about the crimes and insecurity posed by the gang especially at night. We have even lodged complaints with the municipal council asking for security lights to be erected in the entire area,” said a resident who requested anonymity for fear of being attacked.

According to David Kuria Western, director for Nakuru County Human Rights Network, relevant authorities should ensure security for the residents. He condemned the attacks and particularly the rape incidents.

“Some people get out of their working places late in the evening and owing to inflation, have no alternative but to walk homes. Security should be established to curb such incidents,” observed Kuria.

The officer in charge of operations in Rift Valley Willy Lugusa Ndagoga also said that no one has reported any such incidents but promised to investigate the matter.

“Now that you have informed us of such crimes, we are going to look into the matter squarely,” assured Lugusa.

High cost of heart surgery gives mother sleepless nights

By OCHIENG JUMA

For the past year, 29-year-old Ann Nthenya Kioko has had sleepless nights because of her baby's heart condition.

When she gave birth to her second Faith Mueni in June last year, Nthenya was filled with joy like any other mother. However, this joy was short-lived as soon it was discovered that something was wrong with her.

"When I gave birth to Faith, she did not cry as is expected of a new born. I delivered at 8pm but it was until about 1 am in the morning when she cried for the first time," explains Nthenya during an interview at her home in Masii town.

Problems started when she took the child to the clinic for check-up after one month when it was discovered that the baby's weight was not increasing as expected. "When I took her to the clinic at the health centre after one month, she was found to be weighing 3.95 kilograms. It was at this point that I felt something was wrong with my baby," Nthenya says.

Diagnosis

It is then that the mother of two together with her husband decided to take Faith to Machakos Level Five Hospital for further examinations. Nthenya was told she needed to feed the baby better because it looked like she was not eating well.

She bought milk formula for the baby was advised to see if she would improve. On the fourth month baby Faith had Pneumonia infection and fever.

Nthenya was forced to seek medical assistance at the nearest health centre where they were referred once again to Machakos Level Five Hospital because Faith was having problems breathing.

It was at that point that the doctors asked her to take Faith for an echo test and avail the results to the hospital.

"When I took the echo test results back to the hospital, the doctors noticed there was something wrong with my baby's heart. I was immediately referred to Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH)," explains Nthenya as she tries to hold back her tears.

She was admitted in Kenyatta Hospital for a week but the baby continued to experience infections. Another echo

test was done and it confirmed that Faith had a complex heart condition known as Truncus Arteriosus type 1.

"The doctor told me my baby has a hole in her heart and needs surgery to correct the situation. I was shocked by the news but what followed was tough for me, when the doctor added that the operation can only be done in India as it was not offered in Kenya," she explains.

Nthenya says after consultation with the doctors, she was told she would need about KSh1 million for Faith to undergo a heart surgery in India.

"I was given the budget and amount needed for the operation. They said air ticket together with the surgery and accommodation would cost us KSh1 million," she says. Nthenya and her husband could not afford the money needed. They opted for Mater Hospital in Nairobi.

The same examinations were carried which confirmed the same but this time round they were advised to buy some medicine to ease the condition.

"At Mater the doctors gave us medicine but strongly recommended that we take our girl to India so that she could be operated on to reverse the condition," explains Nthenya. She adds: "What is bothering me is that the operation must be done before Faith reaches eight months."

Nthenya has to keep up with various challenges to ensure Faith is comfortable.

Infections

"It is a must that she uses antibiotics every week. She easily gets infections and develops fever," says Nthenya. She adds: "The other challenge is the kind of medication she has to take. Every week she needs drugs worth KSh4,000."

Her husband Kioko works in Nakuru as a company driver and does not earn enough money to sustain this treatment. Nthenya used to sell clothes for her livelihood but was forced to quit to give her baby full time care.

She is now faced with the dilemma of providing quality healthcare for her daughter as the clocks keeps ticking away every second. She is now forced to loop up to well-wishers to come to her baby's aid so that she can have a healthy life.



From top: Ann Nthenya with her baby girl Faith during the interview at their home in Masii town. A letter from The Mater Hospital calling upon well wishers to assist baby Faith undergo heart operation in India. Nthenya attends to her baby. Pictures: Ochieng Juma

According to Heart Diseases in Children Information Centre, in truncus arteriosus is a hole between the two ventricles (ventricular septal defect or VSD) and there is only one blood vessel which emerges from both ventricles at the part where they communicate through the ventricular septal defect.

If untreated, the child will initially suffer from heart failure, which manifests as rapid breathing, poor feeding

and failure to gain weight and grow properly. Surgical repair is recommended in the first two weeks of life.

A letter addressed to whoever can assist Faith by The Mater Hospital and signed by Cardiac Programme Coordinator Susan Gachathi reads that Faith has been diagnosed with a complex heart condition (Truncus Arteriosus Type I) that requires urgent surgery.

Since this type of surgery cannot be performed locally, doctors have ad-

vised that she travels to India where she will undergo the life-saving operation.

The estimated cost of surgery is \$8,000 (about KSh640,000) exclusive of air ticket and accommodation for the accompanying adult. Faith's parents are appealing for assistance from well-wishers to enable them raise funds for this worthy cause.

To assist Faith you can reach Nthenya or Kioko through 0733455441 and 0703821806.

FGM still rife in Embu County despite laws

By KARIUKI MWANGI

The rate of female genital mutilation practices is still high in Embu County saying that the residents continue to practice the illegal vice despite the tough laws prohibiting it.

"The rate of female genital mutilation now stands at 60 percent in Mbeere district while in the larger Embu county, the FGM rates stands at 50 percent," said the National council for children's services chairperson Hel-

len Waweru adding that there is a need for change of attitude regarding the whole issue.

The chairperson pointed out that the communities in the county continue to take part in the retrogressive acts without realising it is hampering the development of the girl child adding that they should be educated to use alternative rites of passage.

Waweru said that the council is already supporting 322 families with orphans and vulnerable children in

Embu County where every family receives KSh2000 saying that last year they used KSh54 million to support the children in Embu County alone.

She said that the council has this year used KSh24 million to support the 130,000 families with orphans and vulnerable children in the country adding that they intend to use KSh3 billion for the same by the end of the year.

According to the director of children services, Ahmed Hussein, there is need to review the country's education

system so as to be able to accommodate all the children to attain education as entailed in the new constitution.

"Of the 811 930 pupils who concluded and got KCPE results, a few of them will get a chance to join secondary schools, and the questions that we are not asking is that, where will the rest of the pupils go?" he posed.

Hussein said that children should not be fully blamed for joining the illegal sects and imbibing into alcohol whereas it is the education system in

the country which is not providing a soft landing for them.

At the same time, she called upon the Independent electoral and boundaries commission (IEBC) to take stern action against politicians who are using children during the campaign period.

Waweru said that the political leaders have been using the children below the age of 18 years in their campaigns mostly to entertain them saying that the IEBC needs to take action so as to protect the children.

Media urged to promote peace through positive stories

By **DIANA WANYONYI**

Print and electronic journalists in Coast region have been urged to be ambassadors of peace through their articles before and after March General election.

Speaking in Mombasa at a media colloquium in Mombasa organised by African Woman and Child Features under Tuvuke Initiative for free, fair and peaceful elections, Father Gabriel Dolan of St Patrick Catholic Parish in Bangladesh who is also a member of Haki Yetu Initiative urged journalists to be at the forefront in publishing positive stories.

Dolan cited the need for journalists to be objective in their reporting by giving prominence to peace stories in order to avoid a repeat of 2007-2008 post-election violence.

Tension

"Sometimes I wonder why journalists have the tendency of ignoring peace functions as most of them usually pass unmentioned in both electronic and print media," noted Dolan. He added: "But most unfortunately the said functions have key factors that affect common mwananchi on the grassroots level and this has posed a big challenge in educating and informing the audience."

However, Dolan cautioned that during this electioneering period journalists should be keen in reporting on conflict sensitive stories in order to avoid tension and unnecessary alarm.

"Media always look for story but not the truth, this has led to lack of integrity and honesty to some of the media houses thus influencing the way we report on sensitive issues such as outlawed groups, tribal clashes and elections," observed Dolan.

On election reporting, he urged the Fourth Estate to stop favouring some political aspirants on individual basis saying this makes them to be biased while covering their stories.

"Election is about Kenyans but not individuals. Journalists should pull out of the politicians' traps and question them on the important issues such as where they get money for campaigns? How much are they spending in campaigns weekly? If they are using public money, how will they repay back given that the Salary and Enumeration Com-

mission has now reduced the next parliamentary pay?" he questioned.

He further urged the police to handle cases Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) with the seriousness they deserve during this election period. He blamed them for being reluctant in handling such cases previously.

GBV

"It is unfortunate how Sexual Gender Based Violence incidences increase during election period in this country. In the Coast region justice has not been done to women who were victims of sexual molestation during the post-election violence in 2007-2008 because the police up to date have not investigated nor prosecuted any sexual offenders," observed Dolan.

Speaking during the workshop, Patrick Ochieng, Executive Director Ujamaa Centre said that the media has an important role to play in enlightening Kenyans on land laws and women land ownership.

"Media has been reluctant to do extensive research on stories related to women and land ownership. They have only highlighted what they are told but not what they need to investigate," noted Ochieng. He added: Investigative stories should be used to shape our understanding by informing us land laws and what the Constitution say about land rights and land ownership."

In a pre-election scenarios, a citizen perception survey conducted by the Ujamaa Trust Centre in three counties of the Coast region — Kwale, Mombasa and Kilifi — land emerged as the



Journalists engage in group discussions at a media colloquium in Mombasa organised by AWC under Tuvuke Initiative for free fair and peaceful elections. Pictures: Diana Wanyonyi

major issue which should be tackled with urgency.

The report shows that the categories of people who are affected by land problems in the region are majority and identified them as being the poor 27.2 per cent, women 19.7 per cent, members of the local communities at 17.4 per cent, family members 16.1 per cent, the marginalized 12.8 per cent and men who are at 11.1 per cent.

"Sometimes I wonder why journalists have the tendency of ignoring peace functions as most of them usually pass unmentioned in both electronic and print media."

— Father Gabriel Dolan

"Women are most affected when it comes to matters of land ownership. They own it through cultivation but they cannot own it as per documentation as they do not own land title deeds. Moreover, they are also denied chances of making major decision over it," noted Ochieng.

"Less than 10 per cent of women in urban areas own land unlike women in rural areas who do not own land as their hands have been tied in the bondage of patriarchal mind-sets which has underprivileged their ability to ownership of land especially if their spouses die or they are obliged to inherit the land without the title deed," Ochieng observed.

Statistics

On Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and historical land injustices, the report shows that many of respondents (51.1 per cent) were not happy with how the government had resolved land issues with regard to IDPs. On the other hand, (48.8 per cent) were of them think that the government has done well.

On land under the new consti-

tution, the report recommends that there is need for the Government to educate people on the work of the National Land Commission and how the Constitution protects their land interests as individuals.

Secondly, the Government should ensure that the new land laws adequately protect the vulnerable not to lose their parcels of land, including the poor, youth, women and marginalized communities.

Thirdly, there is need to have modernized land documentation processes through computerization and installation of universal GIS maps on all parcels of land throughout the country.

Lastly, the Government should weed out processes that promote corruption in acquisition and transfer of land such as discretionary powers vested on individuals liable to misuse them.

However, Ochieng' is optimistic that Ujamaa will liaise with the land task force that is in place to develop laws that will address the issue of women and land ownership as well as provide civic education on their constitutional rights.

Peace and security key to new government

By **JOHN HARRINGTON NDETA**

It is all systems go as the election day draws closer as political parties and coalitions have all unveiled their manifestos and roadmaps.

Priorities for all major parties run from development and economic growth to education and health.

However, the question to ask is whether or not Kenya will have an enabling environment for these noble ideas to be realised. As front runners in the forthcoming polls, what are the risks and assumptions the Eagle, Amani, Jubilee and Cord alliances are working with?

A look at the manifestos shows that political parties have taken development as a technical process, focusing on delivering tangible benefits such as creation of employment or building up formal structures such as well-equipped health centres.

However, to achieve lasting change there needs to be more work put in to

build better state-society relations with a bottoms up approach.

This could involve empowering people to participate in decision-making so that employment is even and all services provided in an open and accountable manner.

One of the main issues I wish to flag out if we are to attain development and economic growth is the issue of peace and security. Kenya is faced with external threats in the form of terrorist group such as Al Shabaab as well as internal discords where several areas including Coast, Nairobi, Nyanza and Rift Valley have been identified as potential hotspots.

Unresolved historical injustices also portend violence to magnitudes that may easily erode economic gains any government may set out to achieve.

Most of the manifestos unveiled did not tackle issues around conflict and fragility of Kenya communities. Recent statistics from the UN point out that "60 per cent of the undernourished, 61 per

cent of the impoverished, 65 per cent of people without access to safe water and 70 per cent of infant deaths occur in fragile or conflict-affected countries."

All those seeking to lead Kenya must prioritise building peace and security across the country if they are to achieve any of their goals and objectives.

The rationale for focusing on peace and security stems from our past experience. In 2007-2008, economic growth rate stood at seven per cent but dropped to a paltry 0.7 per cent within the two months of turmoil.

Resources

Peace and security contributes to the protection of human rights and economic development and no leader should be delighted when hell breaks loose just because he/she has not won.

National and county governments must espouse the principles of conflict sensitivity for development. Conflicts generally revolve around competition for power and resources. Elections and

ascension to power of new leaders under the new election may challenge and change existing power relations, and affect dynamics of peace and conflict.

It is incumbent upon all those who will assume power to practice conflict sensitive approach including deliberately seeking to understand the context they will be leading in especially the conflict dynamics.

Conflict sensitivity is sometimes associated with the 'politicization' of leadership and representation of the people. Leadership and representation is always political especially when it comes to delivery of services because it tends creates winners and losers.

A good leader, therefore, should take into account these politics with an aim of reducing rather than increases injustice and exclusion.

Some of the practical ways our leaders can use after the polls is to put conflict sensitivity into practice. This will include continuous consultation with local stakeholders, ensur-

ing their security concerns are taken into account, as well as reconstruction and development projects that benefit different regions and groups equally. They should operate in ways that support the local economy and provide employment opportunities to local people.

While some political parties have made commitments to peace and security, there is some way to go to translate this into changes in practice. This is particularly evident from our past where leaders have tended to amass wealth for themselves and their cronies under the notion that 'it is our turn to eat'.

A new Kenya must not underdevelop one area at the expense of the other and thereby creating societal tensions that divide the country not only on tribal lines but on the basis of the haves and the have-nots.

The Writer is the Media and Peace Coordinator, Peace Initiative Kenya, International Rescue Committee

Rift Valley drama group 'takes' justice to the villages

By ROBERT WANJALA

It is lunchtime on a warm Saturday, and the playing fields next to the Cheptiret market are packed with people. Men, women and children are jostling for position in front of a raised wooden stage. Without warning, a voice calls out from the crowd, and a man dressed to look like a politician makes his way, panting and clumsily climbs onto the stage.

"I am finished! I am finished! We're all finished! Our people... we are being targeted! Our community! They want to finish us politically and economically!" he shouts.

At this, a band of young men run panic-stricken onto the stage, brandishing machetes and other weapons, and shouting "What? Who? Where? Why?"

On his part, he responds: "ICC! ICC! ICC!"

They come to an abrupt halt. One brave soul makes his way across the stage, trembling as he walks, and asks the politician softly, "Where is he? I mean, ICC?"

As the audience applauds, the politician bows his head. A split second later a 'pastor' walks out from the crowd to tell everyone that the ICC is the International Criminal Court, "a permanent international court established to investigate, prosecute and try individuals, not a group, tribe or community, accused of committing serious crimes of international magnitude".

Cheptiret is a small town located 300 kilometres northwest of Nairobi in the Rift Valley, one of the region's worst hit by the violence that shook Kenya after the disputed presidential election five years ago.

The local drama group, known as

the North Rift Peace Theatre Ambassadors has been performing plays and comedy sketches across the region to help people gain a better understanding of the ICC and clear the misconceptions that are being peddled about it in the run up to the General Elections

The ICC is based at The Hague and has charged four Kenyans, including a leading presidential candidate with crimes against humanity, accusing them of orchestrating the bloodshed of 2007-2008.

Deputy Prime Minister and presidential candidate for the Jubilee Alliance Uhuru Kenyatta, former cabinet secretary Francis Muthaura, former Member of Parliament William Ruto, and journalist Joshua arap Sang are all facing trial for the violence that killed more than 1,000 people and displaced 600,000 others.

Justice

Their trials are scheduled to start on April 10 and 11 at The Hague.

Ruto is Kenyatta's running mate under the Jubilee Alliance ticket.

When the ICC began its investigations in Kenya in 2009, it met with wide public support as Kenyans yearned for justice. However, in the Rift Valley the support quickly diminished when the court announced charges against senior members of government and other popular figures in the region.

When the ICC confirmed the charges against the four suspects in early 2012, Kenyatta and Ruto held "prayer rallies" that quickly seemed as a concerted bid to pull together in the crisis.

"The Eldoret meetings in the Rift Valley were represented as a peace programme but over time they milled into



North Rift Peace Ambassadors dancing at Cheptiret market in Eldoret. The group has been performing in the streets to educate people on peace and elections issues.

Picture: Robert Wanjala

a programme to fight accountability against ICC," said George Kegoro, Executive Director Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists.

"Before Kenyans knew who was on the ICC list of suspects, the support for the court was very high. Immediately after prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo revealed the names of the six suspects, the support dropped by about 50 per cent," said Betty Murungi, vice-chair of the board of the Kenya Human Rights Commission. She added: "This was due to ethnic and political mobilizations that followed afterwards in the country."

The reason why this drama group has come up with plays is because of the misconceptions around the ICC. Those like Paul Rotich are confused and have raised thought about what they think. I no longer have faith in the ICC process," Paul Rotich, who lives in Cheptiret, said. "I have heard many things about the court that have made me lose interest and confidence in the whole process. I don't see justice being done, because the court is biased and has targeted only leaders of certain communities."

Through performances like the one in Cheptiret, the Rift Valley theatre group is trying to change things.

It is currently trailing the presidential campaigners in an effort to reverse misunderstandings about the ICC and rebuild Kenyans' confidence in the justice process.

The theatre group's performance in Cheptiret went down well with the audience.

Knowledge

"I now understand a bit about the ICC," said Gladys Yegon, a mother of five, carrying her baby on her back. "For two hours, I have been standing here watching this group perform I realise our politicians are not telling us the truth. Seeing them act how the ICC works and how it is structured, I now believe it's the best thing to deal with our leaders."

According to Ken Rutto, coordinator of the theatre programme, making people understand the role of ICC in Kenya and countering the many falsehoods about the court has been "a hard nut to crack".

"It has not always been easy to convince locals that the ICC is like any other justice process. One that is independent, free from interference by any state and one that does not target any community or country," explained Rutto.

North Rift Peace Theatre Ambassadors have been welcomed by the ICC especially as they are working in that part of the country where the court has found it particularly difficult to make its aims and activities understood. The performers have been able to explain important elements of the court's work as well as the legal basis for its intervention in Kenya.

"This group is popular and dynamic," said Maria Kamara, the ICC's spokeswoman in Kenya. "It has been helpful in explaining difficult parts of the ICC process through drama."

The group uses drama and dance to communicate messages about peace and raise public awareness about leadership and governance ahead of the elections.

Rutto, 30, began acting in primary school and used to earn a living by impersonating politicians and radio and television presenters. He found that mimicking major personalities was a good way to get people to engage with important issues.

"I noticed that talking with people was not effective, and started acting things out whenever I wanted to pass on any message especially to many people," he said.

The smallest body part key to peaceful elections

Continued from page 1

to gender based violence.

Kimani implored women to promote peace noting that without it there will be no economic development and that its women and their children who will suffer most.

"Without peace women suffer the most. Peace is critical to development and it must start with us as women," she reiterated.

Kimani, a peace monitor with Rural Women Peace Link in Burnt forest said women should unite and champion for peace because during conflict it is women and children who bear the greatest brunt.

These sentiments were echoed by Pamela Ruhunga, who is a political leader in the area. She noted that women and children suffer most in case of violence and, therefore, they should discourage tribalism through talking to their neighbours and the youth who are most vulnerable.

According to Mary Chepkwony, Deputy Director Team Leader with Rural Women Peace Link women need to unite and explore ways of preaching and promoting peace ahead of elections to avoid a repeat of the 2007-2008 post-election violence.

According to Chepkwony, when

peace is disrupted, women suffer and gender based violence increases.

She recalled how women worked hard to bring peace in Mt Elgon after the Sabao Land Defence Force had carried out major atrocities.

Disclosure

"It is women who opened up Mt Elgon to the rest of the world. It is strong women who came to communicate with others out of Mt Elgon to say there were bad things happening for the rest of the world and Kenya to know."

Kimani gave a real life story that recently took place in Burnt Forest that moved the participants. She said through a tragic instance some courageous women averted a potential conflict in the area following a family feud that left a husband and wife dead while leaving behind three children who are now orphans.

"A husband killed his wife who is from a different tribe and later killed himself," Kimani explained. "Relatives and people from the woman's side rushed to the home of the deceased couple wanting to retaliate but some women intervened averting the clash that would have sparked violence between the two communities which were

at a loss."

It was then agreed by all participants that women are very powerful and can either solve conflict or fuel it through the power of their tongue.

It was recalled that in the 2007-2008 post election violence, it is a woman who instigated the conflict.

"Violence in Burnt Forest during the last elections would have been averted were it not for one woman who went dancing in the market celebrating the defeat of a rival political party hence provoking violence," said Kimani.

According to Kimani the woman provoked the community that supported the losing side by saying they would be circumcised down the river. This annoyed them and violence started that left thousands displaced, property destroyed and lives lost.

In 2007 Kenya went to polls ethnically divided more than ever in the country's post-independence history. Besides other parties, two main political forces competing for power were the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and the Party of National Unity (PNU).

The political competition ended in violence following presidential dispute. The heavily disputed presidential re-

sult left over 1,300 people dead, 3,500 injured and over 600,000 fleeing their homes.

Immediately after announcing the disputed elections "a woman in Burnt Forest went to the market dancing while saying we have won and therefore the 'uncircumcised' will have to go and be circumcised", recalled Kimani.

This insinuation provoked the youth in the area wanting to prove who will leave and violence broke out in Burnt Forest making it one of the areas to be marked as a hotspot.

Rwanda

According to Judith Jerebet, an immediate former councillor, Kenyan women needed to emulate their Rwandan counterparts in playing the leading role in peace building.

Jerebet urged women not be swayed during this electioneering period and instead preach peace since that is the only way to be safe be able to take care for their families.

In a veiled poetic message, she appealed to peace actors to consider taking some women to Rwanda to enable them learn on how women helped to bring peace during the genocide in 1994.

In 1994 war broke out in Rwanda. Majority of men were killed. Women from different ethnic backgrounds came together and rolled out peace initiatives through helping each in building houses.

These efforts later turned around the leadership game in Rwanda. Available statistics show that Rwanda leads the world with an average 56 per cent women representation in parliament.

Joyce Muchena, national coordinator Peace Initiative Kenya, said women in the region faced almost similar challenges. She noted that because of the post election violence, some parts of Uasin Gishu County have been branded 'hotspots' but she reiterated the sad fact that mentioning certain regions is synonymous with gender based violence.

"This 'hotspot' tag could slow development progress in the region as no one would want to come and invest in the region that is insecure," noted Muchena.

It is sad that this region is associated with images of violence. "As women you need to be anchored in everything to change the bad image associated with this region," reiterated Muchena. She added: "When history will be written about the new image of this region, someone will remember your work as women in peace."

Naomi Shaban seeks to defend her Taveta seat

By **BENSON MWANGA**

As the clock ticks towards 2013 General Election, Dr Naomi Shaban's name will be on the ballot paper. This time she is vying for the position of Member of Parliament for Taveta Constituency having received direct nomination from The National Alliance party.

Even though, she did not have to go through the gruelling nomination process that a majority of the women underwent, it has not always been that easy. Politics has exposed Dr Naomi Shaban, Minister for Gender, Children's Affairs and Social Services to the extra hurdles women politicians have to contend with.

In 2001, when she embarked on elective politics, Shaban who is also the outgoing Taveta MP had a difficult time to convince the local council of elders (Njama) to allow her contest for the seat in a by-election.

Patriarchy

Perturbed by their patriarchal behaviour, she defied elders who had gone to request her mother to convince Shaban to drop her parliamentary bid in favour of a man.

Since the by-election then, she has gone to serve as the Member of Parliament for Taveta Constituency going on to win subsequent elections.

"I simple rebelled against this cultural bias against women and went ahead with my ambitions of becoming an MP," she says. Shaban was appalled by this traditional belief that a woman should not aspire for a leadership position.

Had it not for her mother's blessings and other women's encouragement that they would back her all the way through she could have pulled out.

Her chance to plunge into elective politics came after the then Taveta MP Basil Criticos left the country in 2001 the following year and the seat was subsequently declared vacant.

Naomi says though she was not ready her supporters convinced her that it was the best opportunity to test the waters in the by-election which followed later.

Culture

The council of elders would not allow her to vie for the parliamentary seat due to restrictive cultural beliefs against women.

She describes the beliefs as outdated, retrogressive and counterproductive to women seeking elective positions in the community.

Shaban was denied a Kanu nomination after the council of elders sent a delegation to the party's headquarters in Nairobi to restrain the party from nominating her.

"I was bitter with the elder's decision but I decided to soldier on with my quest," she says.

She approached Vice President and Ford Kenya national chairman the late Michael Wamalwa Kijana who granted her a certificate to participate in the by-election. She managed to come third in the competitive race won by Jackson

Mwalulu.

When the 2002 General Election was called, Shaban had done her ground work well and she easily romped home on a Kanu ticket.

She retained her seat in 2007 and was subsequently appointed to the cabinet becoming the first woman from the Coast region to become a minister.

This time she will be defending her position on the TNA ticket. Although she will be once gain facing male competitors, she believes that her track record in the development of Taveta Constituency will be her benchmark in reclaiming the seat.

Shaban has been instrumental in the buying of 15,000 acres of land that has seen the resettlement of 10,000 people.

This is why even now she looks at resettlement of squatters as one factor that tops her key agenda if re-elected.

She is also focusing on improving standards of education in the area because they have been relatively low.

"I would like to have more schools built and have them equipped with the necessary facilities," says Shaban. "I want to ensure that teacher student ratio is not so wide because with the free primary education we have seen that the gap between pupils and teachers is very wide."

She adds: "It is now time that ancient cultural values be avoided to give equal education opportunities to both boys and girls."

She also wants to see to it that road infrastructure in the Taita Taveta County is improved.

Development

In the previous Parliament Shaban pushed for the construction of the Taveta-Mwatate-Voi road. This road is in a deplorable state and she would like reconstruction to start immediately.

"I want to ensure that if I am elected, the contractor will be on site by June," she says.

Not fearing the challenge she is going to face now, Shaban unlike other women is quite prepared for the competition. She has her development record in Taveta to back her up. She will also be depending on the women and her community to back her.

Shaban ensured that loans from the Women Enterprise and Youth funds reached her constituents as well.

She is happy that in her tenure many unemployed youth from Taveta got jobs in the civil service and within the private sector.

Having been a minister and an MP, resources might not be a challenge as it would be for newcomers who might have come from a background of unemployment.

"I have a lot of satisfaction that Taveta people have confidence in me and that is why they had given me a second chance to represent them in parliament," she says.

While encouraging more women to vie for political positions in future, Shaban challenges them to start campaigning early enough.

"Lack of empowerment has dis-



Naomi Shaban ,Member of Parliament Taveta constituency. She overcame many challenges to earn the seat and is defending it on a second term. Picture: Benson Mwangi

couraged a number of women to fight for leadership positions but I am encouraging them to vie because politics is not a preserve of men," she says.

Shaban has indeed come a long way from the time she had to learn how to make meals for her siblings while her grandparents were away working on small pieces of leased land in Taveta.

At the time of her tender age, her widowed mother was away working in a printing firm in Nairobi. She says when her father died and the family relocated from Mombasa to Taveta to live with her maternal grandparents.

"Due to the grinding poverty, my mother had to move to Nairobi to look for a job to fend for us," Shaban explains. "I realised then that education was the only way out of the poverty that had affected my family."

Education

Her success to life was seen when she enrolled in Standard One at Mahoo Primary School in Taveta.

She was a bright girl emerging top of her class every end term and everybody in the village envied her sterling performance.

"I was happy with my grandparents that despite my chores at home they helped in shaping my destiny," she says.

After sitting her CPE in 1975, she scored 30 out of 36 points, no mean achievement then. She was admitted to Bura Girls' School in Taita although her choice was Alliance Girls' High School.

After her "O" levels she passed well and was admitted to Butere Girls for "A" levels.

It turned out that school fees was a

major problem and her mother who was depending on loans from her place of work to educate her.

"After deductions and domestic needs she hardly had any money for anything else," recalls Shaban.

She passed her "A" levels and was admitted to the University of Nairobi to study Dental Surgery. Before joining university she briefly worked for Housing Finance Company of Kenya (HFCK).

Career

After graduating with a degree in Dental Surgery in 1988, Shaban did her internship at Kenyatta National Hospital and was posted thereafter to Kajiado District Hospital.

She worked in Kajiado until 1995 when she resigned to engage in private practice.

From the time she started working she was involved in development activities back at home. She took special

interest in the education of girls as well as assisting young people get into colleges as well as securing jobs.

As a result of this, women identified her as a potential leader.

"It is the women who convinced me to vie for the Taveta parliamentary seat which had been held by Basil Criticos," she says.

Although she is defending her parliamentary seat for the third time, Shaban says she is faced with the task of finding a lasting solution to the squatter problem which is a thorny issue. She is also thinking of how to deal with the perennial flooding menace, persistent human wildlife conflict and improving poor road infrastructure in the area among others.

She notes that a feasibility study has been conducted on how to control recurrent cross-border floods in the area.

Shaban promises to ensure provision of clean drinking water for domestic use and irrigation to improve food security, education for all, easy access to health facilities as well as rural electrification to all villages.

Other issues she seeks to tackle include market access for agricultural produce to local farmers, security and establishment of settlement schemes to benefit the locals.

Shaban says she will strive to empower her constituents economically by making use of locally available resources to improve their well-being.

Some of her projects she initiated and completed that are geared towards fighting poverty include Njoro Kubwa Irrigation Canal, revival of Lake Jipe Rehabilitation Project, Ngutuni Rural Electrification Project as well as HIV and Aids projects among others.

"I have a lot of satisfaction that Taveta people have confidence in me and that is why they had given me a second chance to represent them in parliament."

— Dr Naomi Shaban

Lucy Muthaka, youngest aspirant on the race to Parliament

By MERCY MUMO

At 28 years, Lucy Muthaka is the youngest parliamentary aspirant in the country. She clinched the United Democratic Forum (UDF) party to run for the Embakasi West parliamentary seat.

Muthaka exudes confidence that she will win the seat. She is the only Member of Parliament in Nairobi County elected with more votes during the nominations. (How many votes did she get against her opponents)

She attributes this to her three campaign managers who worked tirelessly to ensure she is visible, relevant and accessible to the people.



Lucy Muthaka is the youngest aspirant for parliamentary seat in Kenya but she believes that she has enough experience and leadership skills to represent Embakasi West constituency. Picture: Henry Owino

Muthaka is a student currently pursuing a degree in political science from the University of Nairobi. She holds a diploma in business management from Nairobi Institute of Business Studies.

"It was not as easy as you may think. The notion out there is that if you are aspiring to be in politics it is automatic that you have the resources. While campaigning, voters expect you to convince them with money and other freebies," she laments.

Besides politics, Muthaka is a peace ambassador in her area and chairperson of Voice of Women, a non-governmental organisation that empowers women and youth economically.

"We give small loans to women and the youth to start their own businesses. We also engage in community policing where we conduct clean up exercises and spread the peace messages," she explains.

Projects

Being development conscious, Muthaka has been supporting several youth projects in Embakasi Constituency. She opened Logical School of Professionals with the support of Gatekeepers International based in USA to engage almost 300 students for free career education mostly on IT.

Previously, Muthaka worked with the late Professor George Saitoti in 2006 as his campaign consultant for the youth. The young aspirant is passionate about working with the youth. Her campaign is focussing on peace, security, development, health care job creation and dealing with ethnicity and tribalism. (what does she hope to do in all these topics?)

Muthaka was also the first candidate from Embakasi West to be cleared by Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and immediately organised a peaceful rally. One of her campaign managers, Jamlek Avesa was President Kibaki's campaign manager in 2007. This makes her campaign unique.

On winning come Match 4, she is confident and positive that she will make it. If elected, she promises to give Embakasi the face it deserves in terms of improved infrastructure, modern health facilities and job creation for the youth through partnerships. (How will she do all these?)

She is appealing to all Kenyans and especially women to come out and make the right choice come election time.

"Come March 4, all Kenyans should head to the ballot to elect their person of choice without any interference. Let us also exercise peace as we vote, we cannot afford to see ourselves where we were five years ago," says Muthaka.

What are the strong points of the candidate compared to her competitors.

Security tops Catherine Omanyo's agenda Matayos Constituency

By GILBERT OCHIENG

A seasoned politician from Busia County and a product of Matayos division, Catherine Omanyo is determined to battle it out with men in the race for the newly established Matayos parliamentary seat recently carved out of the former Nambale Constituency.

She is exuding confidence and is aiming at nothing short of winning.

Omanyo is a business-woman and director of Imprezza Schools established in 2001. In her first political stint, she vied for the Nambale parliamentary seat in 2007 under the Kenya African Democratic Development Union (KADU) party ticket formerly owned by Cyrus Jirongo. She emerged third out of 11 contestants with the former legislator Chris Oke-mo carrying the day. After losing the election in 2007, her party KADU rewarded her with the position of National Women Leader in 2008.

Omanyo has also been involved in football management having served as Secretary General of Abaluhya Football Club (AFC) commonly known as Leopards football club between June 2010 and December 2011.

However, she gave up this position after persistent calls by the residents of Matayos that she joins the political arena.

After her secondary education at St Mary's Mumias Girls High School, Omanyo joined the University of Nairobi in 1998 and graduated with a degree in education in 2002. In 2003, she enrolled at Data Centre in Nairobi for a certificate course in computer studies.

Practice

Determined to gain leadership experience, she attended a youth leadership programme at the National Development Institute in the United States of America that works with development officers in a corporate training setting introducing them to major specialities like fundraising. She attended a youth leaders' workshop in the United Kingdom 2009 and in May 2010 and had an opportunity to lecture at Stokeinteinhed in the Devon County.

"Armed with the above academic and professional experience especially in leadership, I feel I have what it takes to enable me effectively manage development affairs in Matayos Constituency if elected MP," says Omanyo. She notes that though her opponents have underrated her, they are in for a rude shock come the General Election.

Her contribution and achievement in the society include the establishment of Im-



Catherine Omanyo, candidate Member of Parliament Matayos constituency. Education tops her priorities and she is determined to improve it if elected. Picture: Gilbert Ochieng

prezza Schools in the county. Currently phase one which is primary school is done. She is now working on the next phase which also constitutes a college where students in the school will benefit from.

Achievements

"They will come out of Imprezza with both pragmatic and theoretical skills. I have also introduced Lunga and Nang'oma schools in Nambale and Matayos respectively to partner schools in the United Kingdom.

The teachers involved in education exchange programmes on how they can improve education standards in the regions," explains Omanyo.

"I have also managed to secure employment for a good number of young school leavers in Kenya and in the Middle East. I have as well empowered various women and youth groups through the provision of farm inputs to promote agriculture and catering services," explains Omanyo. She adds: "I have also managed to take

school leavers to various colleges that include Multi-Media University, Ramogi Institute of Advanced Technology (RIAT) in Kisumu City and Bumba Technical College among others where the beneficiaries pursue the skills of their choice."

Omanyo is focusing majorly on education saying majority of needy children especially orphaned vulnerable children do not complete their schooling. She observes that they are forced to drop out of school due lack of funds to either cater for tuition or secondary fees because they cannot access bursary to enable them remain in school.

Challenges

She argues that the bursary committee is biased and only assist children whose parents are in good books of the local leadership where those purported not to have voted for the local leaders are denied funding.

Omanyo's concerns include the rising cases of insecurity

not only in the division but across the entire constituency. Of essence she notes that lack of streetlights along the busy highway as giving thugs the opportunity to attack people.

"The current leadership has failed to protect the residents of Matayos especially the motor-bike operators in the area," says Omanyo. She explains: "Boda boda riders are always losing their motorbikes to people posing as passengers with majority of them losing their lives after refusing to let go of the bikes which are their source of livelihood."

For this reason Omanyo says that she will give security first priority unlike the outgoing local leaders who have turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the residents.

"Armed with the above academic, professional and work experiences especially in leadership, I feel I have what it takes to enable me to effectively manage development affairs in Matayos Constituency if elected MP," she reiterates.

Jane Okendo seeks to bridge inequality gap

By FAITH MUIRURI

Jane Okendo has inched closer to becoming the first county representative for the Central Kamagambo Ward under the new Constitution. Her political bid emboldened by her resounding victory during the just concluded political party primaries.

Okendo is the only woman in Migori County who notched a comfortable victory at the primaries to clinch the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party ticket and secure a vantage point ahead of the elections.

She is optimistic that she will garner overwhelming votes during the forthcoming General Election. Her candidature is likely to receive a major boost as Central Kamagambo Ward is arguably perceived to be an ODM stronghold and chances are that the outcome of the grassroots party elections will shape the political realities that may determine the election outcome.

Okendo is not new in the political arena. She first bounced into the political limelight in 2007 when she contested for the Rongo parliamentary seat but lost to Dalmas Otieno at the primaries. However, she managed second position in the hotly contested race.

"This helped to strengthen my resolve to join elective politics and I have never turned back," Okendo notes during the interview.

She has since mounted door-to-door campaigns and managed to establish a formidable network at the ward level.

Motivation

"The 2007 General Election served to propel me to the public limelight and, therefore, I had to work hard to realize my dream to join elective politics," she says.

Okendo says the journey has not been easy but the sacrifice this time round could reward her with the post of a county representative. Her door-to-door campaign strategy has helped endear her to the people and earned her some political mileage.

Renowned for her charity work, Okendo is not new to the community and has managed to win

local support through her philanthropic work.

"Leadership means being able to identify with the people you serve, knowing their problems and helping to resolve them," she explains.

Okendo's passion is to bridge the glaring inequalities in society and this is what inspired her to join politics.

"The plight of poor rural families struggling to make ends meet pushed me into politics," she explains.

She is credited for having helped equip schools with cooking gas. This, she says, was aimed at ensuring that students and girls, in particular, are confined to schools to help minimise their chances of dropping out of school.

"About 44 schools have benefitted from the initiative which has also helped improve students' general performance," she observes.

She now prides herself for initiating a programme that has increased enrolment and retention of girls in schools. She says most girls in the area drop out of school due to unwanted pregnancies or forced marriages.

Record

Okendo has also been able to build 22 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in the area. She says that ECD centres have in the past been accorded little attention despite the fact that they play a critical role in laying foundation to a child's development and learning.

Okendo says that the initiative has helped to facilitate an enabling and stimulating environment at the foundation stages of lifelong learning.

She observes that a shaky foundation affects a child's opportunity for holistic learning and growth.

The aspirant says that the Kenyan Constitution provides that every child has a right to free and compulsory basic education which entails quality services and access to educational institutions including facilities for persons with disabilities.

Similarly, Vision 2030 also recognises that education and training of all Kenyans is fundamental to the success of development and, therefore, the need to inculcate education into



Jane Okendo, candidate County Representative for Central Kamagambo. Picture: Courtesy

the core of leadership.

Okendo recognises that women form a solid foundation in society. It is in this respect that she has helped many of them to venture into income generating projects.

"I have helped about 15 women groups in the area to establish small businesses and some are currently engaged in fish farming and other commercial ventures," she says.

Okendo has also been engaged in HIV campaigns that seek to eliminate stigma associated with the pandemic whose prevalence rate remains high in the area.

Having worked with the community, Okendo notes that she is better placed to implement programmes that will purely lead to improved livelihoods and lifestyles of the local people.

She says that agriculture has not received adequate attention and farmers have virtually relied on fish farming, a practice which is to blame for the dwindling fish stock. Once elected, she plans to help farmers diversify their

agricultural activities.

Her primary concern, if elected, will be to push for laws that will help to address the rising cases of unemployment among the youth. Access to clean water is something that her constituents suffer from and she will, through the county government push for the installation of piped water as majority of the area residents are still fetching the commodity from rivers.

She intends to employ an inclusive approach in her leadership and promises to restore the community's role as being active participant in development. She says the area has continued to lag behind in development because the community has not been engaged in taking ownership of projects initiated.

Plans

"If elected I will establish development committees at the sub-locational level. These committees will be tasked with the responsibility of planning and prioritising development in their respective areas to guide in the disbursement of funds," Okendo explains.

She says that in the past, resources have been channelled to a limited segment of the ward's population while a large percentage of the area lagged behind in development.

She also plans to push for the introduction of a monthly stipend targeting the elderly and widows in the community at the county level. This, she says, will help augment the existing kitty and ensure that the group is not deprived of basic necessities as majority currently live in abject poverty.

Okendo is a peace crusader and plans to promote harmonious coexistence in the area which borders Kuria and Kisii communities.

The aspirant holds a certificate in Community Development from the University of Nairobi. She has also been trained on Guidance and Counselling at the same institution. She is currently undertaking a Diploma in Sociology at the Catholic University.

She has been roped into ODM presidential campaign team and appeals to losers in the race to accept defeat.

Rebecca Kitana in the race for MP Kangundo Constituency

By JOYCE CHIMBI

Rebecca Mbithe Kitana is among those battling it out for the Kangundo Constituency parliamentary seat. It is no laughing matter for the youthful leader who is running against 15 male contestants.

Kitana, who is vying under the National Vision Party, is a well-known figure in Machakos County, having made an unsuccessful attempt for the same seat in 2007, and also for her work within Kangundo Constituency, that has spanned over a decade.

Having graduated from Kenyatta University in 2000 with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, Kitana knew that her work would not only involve interacting closely with people, but serving them as well.

With time, she became aware of the distinct ways in which men and women interact and ways in which poverty affects both. It is this awareness that led her to pursue a Post-Graduate Diploma in Gender Studies in 2005.

Gender

"I gained a solid awareness of the fact that if we are to improve the socio-economic status of men and women, we must understand how issues of gender play out within the context of development. I wanted to serve the society from a point of knowledge," Kitana explains.

For the last ten years, Kitana has been working as a gender consultant



Rebecca Kitana has been instrumental in fighting for women's reproductive rights. She is now ready to serve the residents of Kangundo constituency. Picture: Joyce Chimbi

and has been very instrumental in convening community groups and networks within Machakos County.

"These groups have not been limited to women. I work with youths, men and women because the society belongs to all of us. I also work from an understanding that different groups have very specific needs, and for maximum results, these differences must be acknowledged," she expounds.

Kitana has over the years invested a lot of time and personal resources in

civic education. "I was there at the inception of the current Constitution's review. Throughout the long road that the first draft travelled to the 2010 promulgation, I walked my people through the issues represented in the Constitution," says Kitana.

She explains: "I mobilized women, men and youth for community forums and seminars so that they too could understand and also give their views regarding the Constitution."

Kitana has worked closely with

grassroots women to ensure that they not only understand about the Women Enterprise Fund, a micro-finance credit that was flagged off by the Government in 2007 to improve the socio-economic status of women, but that they use the fund in sustainable and substantial ways.

"Women Enterprise Fund is very active in Machakos, in fact, we are a model example. We can only move forward as a country if people understand how to be self-reliant," she observes.

Kitana says that her work also extends to working with the disabled. Last year, she recalls receiving a distress call from Utooni Village which is less than two kilometres away from Kangundo town, in Machakos County.

The situation involved a young disabled girl who can neither walk nor crawl because her limbs are too weak, who was six months pregnant.

"Kitana followed Nduku's situation closely and was very instrumental in her survival as well as that of the child," says Jacinta Mutio, Nduku's neighbour.

Kitana is also known for her campaign to improve the reproductive health of women in her constituency.

In Utooni, for instance, where women deliver until their wombs run dry, she is familiar to the women for her efforts to improve maternal health.

However, her contribution has not been limited to health. "I have been the chair of Machakos County Women Fo-

rum. This is a forum that is geared towards narrowing the leadership gap between men and women in the County," she says.

Kitana explains that this goes hand in hand with the Constitution that has stipulated the need to expand the political arena to ensure that women and men occupy positions of leadership.

Equality

She, therefore, envisions a society where everyone has an equal chance to access opportunities and to better themselves.

Her campaign is, therefore, anchored around the theme 'Bridging the gap between the rich and poor'.

"As a parliamentarian, my work will be to legislate. To make laws that address issues that affect Kenyans on a day to day basis," she says. Kitana explains: "These will be laws that ensure that not only are health centres accessible but that they are also stocked with medicine as well as enough health practitioners to serve the people."

Kitana also speaks about laws that improve the education sector, and will ensure that those who are intellectually gifted, as well as those gifted with skills are enriched by the system.

"When I was younger, I was told that by 2000 there will be water for all. Thirteen years past that deadline and thousands of my constituents are still with no water. I intend to work towards laws that speak to these issues," Kitana declares.

Milcah Miruka hopes for top management of Kisii County

By BEN OROKO

Milcah Kerubo Miruka is contesting for the seat of Deputy Governor in the Kisii County. She will be the running mate to Dr Peter Ndemo, who is running for the Kisii County governorship.

Miruka was born on May 25, 1952 at Masisi village of Masige clan, Bobasi Constituency in Kisii County.

She went to Kiobegi Primary (1960-1963) from Standard One to Four and Kereri Primary Boarding School (1964-1966) from where she sat her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). She later proceeded to Alliance Girls' High School for her 'O' levels between 1967-1970 and continued in the same school for 'A' levels between 1971-1972.

She joined the University of Nairobi in 1973 and graduated in 1976 with a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree, majoring in English and History.

Career

Miruka has previously held several positions in the teaching career, including serving as an assistant teacher at Itierio Secondary School (1976-1981), headmistress of Kioge Girls' High School between October 1981 and December 1999.

She served as deputy Principal at Kaimosi Teachers' Training College between January 2000 and October 2002.

After rising through the ranks in her teaching career to the position of senior principal, she was deployed to Narok Teachers' Training College as a Chief Principal where she served between November 2002 and October 2008 from where she retired.

During her teaching career, Miru-

ka served as secretary to the Kenya Secondary Heads Association (KES-SHA), Kisii branch from 1989 to 1999.

She has also been privileged to hold several positions in the society including being chairperson to the Nduru Boys' High School board. She was also a board member of Sametat High School, Kenyena TTC and Margaret Okari (Goti Chaki) Primary School for the orphans in South Mugirango Constituency, Gucha South District.

Service

Her political contribution to the society includes serving as a presiding officer with the defunct Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) during the elections in 1992 at Nyankongo polling station in Kitutu Chache constituency, 1997 at Nyanko polling station, Nyaribari Chache Constituency and in 2002 at Tendere polling station, Bomachoge Constituency.

As an educationist, Miruka previously contributed to the economic empowerment of local members to finance education under Nyamataro Education Fund.

Much of her past contribution to the community and society revolved around her education career, during which she offered guidance and counselling to students.

Currently, she is a secretary to the Education committee of Gusii Culture and Development Council. She is also an assistant secretary to the management committee of the same council.

She also served as a facilitator in guidance and counselling as well as family planning teachers' seminars organised by Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI) in Nyanza Province.



Milcah Kerubo Miruka hopes to bring positive change in Kisii County through Deputy Governor's position. Picture: Ben Orok

During her campaigns, Miruka promises to focus on gender parity in both access and continued provision of quality education to both boys and girls.

Miruka says her tenure as deputy

governor will focus on women's empowerment through provision affordable credits to women and youth to enhance their potential in business investments.

Describing majority of the diseas-

es as water-borne, Miruka will also focus on provision of safe and clean piped water to local communities alongside improved and accessible healthcare services to all.

Her campaigns are also focusing on infrastructural development where she promises to ensure all rural access roads will be made all-weather to link local agricultural communities with markets for their produce.

Decrying rampant exploitation of local farmers by middlemen, Miruka pledges to work towards establishment of local primary producer co-operative societies through which farmers for various agricultural products can market their produce based on the existing market prices and demand.

Exploitation

"If I and the governor candidate get elected into office, we will ensure the county government we will form addresses the problem of exploitation of local farmers by middle-men and work towards the establishment of primary producer co-operative societies through which farmers can set prices for their agricultural produce and get value for their commodities without being exploited by middlemen," states Miruka.

Her strong campaign points include being a running mate to a candidate with a wide range of experience in public service.

Her past contributions to the community is also an added advantage to her candidature as much of her service was in the education sector where she invested much of her time producing human labour which has positively transformed the society.

Pascalina Makonjio, youthful and raring to uplift Nambale

By GILBERT OCHIENG

Being a resident of an area where it was believed that only the men could make good leaders, Pascalina Makonjio, the last born in a family of seven, has defied all odds to become the first woman to declare her bid to battle it out for the Nambale parliamentary seat.

Under the New Ford Kenya ticket, Makonjio hopes to win in the March 4 general election.

Prior to joining the race for the Nambale parliamentary seat, Makonjio worked with various organisations namely GTZ, Rural Outreach Programme and K-REP bank as a researcher. From 2002 to 2006, she worked as a youth leader in-charge of the larger Butere-Mumias District. She was later elected youth coordinator for Western Province.

During the same period she also served as a coordinator at the Young Women Institute charged with the responsibility of coordinating activities of young women in Western Province.

Opportunity

"The appointments gave me the chance to serve in different development committees where I effectively championed the interest of young people especially issues touching on the welfare of women," explains Makonjio, a mother of three.

Makonjio exudes confidence saying if elected Nambale Member of Parliament she will deliver on her promises considering that

she has been actively engaged in youth movement in the country. She observes that she has been able to sample the challenges they go through which include poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment and early marriages as well as the effects of HIV and Aids.

"My active involvement in decision making at various levels in society has given me the push to contest for the seat," says Makonjio. She notes: "If I win I will ensure equal representation as far as development is concerned including in the creation of employment opportunities which would reduce the current high levels of poverty."

Training

Makonjio has also engaged in computer related business for a period of eight years providing free training to Form Four school leavers. She has also offered employment to several youth after training.

Makonjio is focusing majorly on agriculture considering that Busia County has resources which include fertile land and adequate rainfall that could be utilised to address food scarcity.

On her agenda there are also issue to do with health, water, infrastructure and security.

Makonjio says that if elected Nambale legislator, she will allocate funds from the Constituency Development Fund kitty to facilitate construction of health centres to bring skilled health care close to the people. She notes that scores of patients especially expectant mothers are forced to travel long distance to Nam-

bale Health Centre.

She notes the shortage of staff at Nambale Health Centre, a situation that she claims has been brought about by lack of concern on the part of outgoing leadership that has failed to address the situation.

Makonjio says that most areas in the Constituency do not have safe and clean water noting that the boreholes that had been sunk with the Constituency development Fund had all dried up. She says this has affected the residents forcing them to walk long distance in search of the commodity.

Transport

She notes that roads in the area are impassable especially during the rainy season making transportation of agricultural commodities to the markets a nightmare for the residents.

Makonjio is also concerned with the security situation and says it needs to be addressed urgently placing it among her top agenda.

"The residents of Nambale have been living in extreme fear of late due to insecurity," says Makonjio.

Born on April 16, 1978 in Nambale, Busia



Pascalina Makonjio, youthful and ambitious woman is out to prove that women can provide better leadership.

Picture :Gilbert Ochieng

County, Makonjio attended Mutoma Primary School before proceeding to Butere Girls' High School in from 1991 to 1995.

She justifies her quest for the Nambale parliamentary seat by saying that her rivals have been offering empty pledges during campaigns. "The local leadership has failed to address unemployment or empower the youth economically because they want to continue manipulating them with every election for their personal political gain. I will change all that if I am elected MP," she says with determination.

Rachael Dzombo

A woman of many first seeks to make another history

By ADAM JUMA

She has been fearless in her campaigns in challenging her male rivals and promises to give them a tough time.

"This is the time for the people of Kilifi South to break the chain of male dominated politics and vote women in to power who I believe will change the face of politics in this constituency. We want to have issue based politics and not just mere talk," says Rachel Dzombo who seeks to be the first woman Member of Parliament in Kilifi County.

Dzombo is a woman of many firsts having been the first girl from the region to join high school and also the first woman from Kilifi to become permanent secretary. She now wants to make history once gain by being the first woman to be Member of Parliament for Kilifi South Constituency.

Dzombo was born on September, 20, 1956 at Kidutani Village, Chonyi Division in Kilifi County. The seventh born in a family of 11 children, she thanks her parents for not discriminating against her.

Discrimination

Dzombo went to school at a time when girls at a time when most parents did not value educating their daughters. However, her parents supported her throughout, she is grateful to them.

In 1965 she joined Kidutani Primary School and upon completion was admitted to St Johns Girls' Secondary School. She was the only girl from Kilifi to join Matuga Girl's High School for her 'A' levels education in 1976 after emerging the best girl in 'O' levels in 1975.

She passed her 'A' levels and earned an admission to the University of Nairobi in 1978 where graduated with Bachelor of Arts degree, upper second class honours in 1981.

Upon graduation, Dzombo joined the civil service as an assistant secretary in 1982 after being interviewed by the Public Service Commission.

She worked in eight different government ministries where she gained experience and exposure on public service.

She was trained on administrative and management skills at the Kenya Institute of Administration (KIA). Through these trainings, she gained knowledge on development skills for senior women managers.

Through patience and persistence in a male dominated field, Dzombo emerged as a qualified budget and finance manager in all the ministries she worked in. She was the only finance officer in the civil service from the Coast Province.

In 1988 after a stiff competition with civil servants to qualify for the prestigious public service training in the US sponsored by the USAID, she emerged the best and got a chance to travel for the training at the University of Connecticut's Institute of Public Service where she enhanced her public service management skills.

With the blessings from her husband Nicholas Dzombo, she left behind a nine month-old son Samuel Kai, now 26, to advance her career.

In 1991, she was identified by Overseas Development Agency to study development programmes in Britain, India, Thailand and Singapore.

Dzombo later got an opportunity to train in management in Tokyo, Japan in 1996. In 2002 she attended an outstanding performance management course at Witwatersrand University, South Africa before training in strategic planning under ESAMI in Swaziland.

In 2003-2004 she traversed East Africa to cover the Jua Kali/Nguluvi Kazi programmes.

After 23 years of exemplary service as a civil servant, the government of Kenya recognised her outstanding performance and appointed her permanent secretary in the Ministry of Gender, Sports and Social Services in 2005. She became the first female permanent secretary from Coast Province.

She comfortably managed a staff of about 5,000 in the ministry and represented the country in many international forums as head of delegation.

In the 2006-2007 financial year, her ministry was number one in the performance contract.

"My work ethics was formed on six pillars; prayer, love, hard work, teamwork, humility and understanding. These were the things that kept me going in my endeavours," explains Dzombo.

Interventions

The poverty index in Kilifi County that has been rated the poorest in Kenya propelled the government and other NGOs to put some interventions to address the problem.

Her interest in politics, she says, was driven by the highest number of poverty index in the



Rachel Dzombo has been bold enough to try what many Coastal women would not dare. This time she is determined to stop male dominance in Kilifi South constituency. Picture: Adam Juma

two divisions of Kilifi South Constituency — Chonyi and Kikambala.

"The interventions by the government sidelined some areas and gave more emphasis to others. The projects by the NGOs lack sustainability such that when the donor pulls out of the project then that particular project will stall," she notes.

Dzombo has received a lot of support from women's groups which she played a key role in forming and are now the driving force of her campaigns.

She has also made a great mark in the education sector in Chonyi Division where she has initiated an award for the best improved school in the area and the best performing candidate.

She also initiated a benchmarking programme where schools from Chonyi division

visit other schools to learn some tips on how to perform well.

However, politics is not easy and she faces stiff competition from male counterparts who are also fighting to get a share of the women's vote in the area.

Other aspirants in the seat include Ken Chonga of Shirikisho, immediate former Bahari MP Benedict Gunda of Chama Cha Uzalendo (CCU), Victor Mwango of United Republican Party (URP), Mustapha Idd of Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and Nicholas Wanyepi of The Independent Party (TIP).

"As an aspirant I have a challenge in the funding of my campaign budget, repairs of my old vehicles and operating the campaign strategy. These are the issues that I am currently fighting with but I am sure I will be able to overcome them," she notes.

Mary Kanana Nteere seeks to strengthen the family unit

By MARTIN MURITHI

The Parliamentary position in Meru has attracted only three women after other eligible politicians who could have vied for the position scamped to crowd in the newly created position of women representative seat.

Buuri constituency, a new constituency has attracted two women in the race and Mary Kanana Nteere is one of them.

Nteere who is vying on the Alliance Party of Kenya ticket is currently the Party's women leader and also sits in its national governing committee.

Having been on the campaign trail for the last eight months, Nteere requests all voters in the constituency to vote for a leader who is development conscious.

Having been in community ser-



Mary Kanana gearing up to be the Member of Parliament Buuri constituency. Picture: Martin Muriithi.

vice, she has initiated many development projects and confirms that she has laid down a strong foundation for continuing with the agendas already put in place.

Of essence is her achievement in promoting education where for the last 10 years she has supplied more than 100 schools in the constituency with end term examinations.

"I have offered all these schools with examinations and this has enabled our constituency to improve greatly in national performance. We expect this year after the rankings are done we will have improved further," she says.

Nteere who considers herself a woman of development began her education in Kigane Primary School and later joined Mater Girls' School before joining Kaaga Girls' High School.

She later went to The University of Nairobi and studied Marketing. Although she secured permanent employment, she has also been engaging in doing family business.

Nteere who will be facing it off with seven men in the race, says she is proud of her family which has been supportive of her campaigns.

She targets to improve the road network in the constituency which she says is in a pathetic state.

"Our roads are bad, infrastructure is underdeveloped and I know what needs to be done for the constituency to compete fairly with other regions because it's the least developed in Meru County," she says.

She notes that the constituency lacks enough hospitals and those in place lack enough equipment and medication to treat the sick.

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It has been a long road travelled for Jennifer Masis

By **GEORGE OMONSO**

When Jennifer Masis recently lost her bid for a seat in the East Africa Legislative Assembly (EALA) by seven votes, many thought the Trans Nzoia women's rights activist had ended her political career and crusade for elective leadership.

However, this was not the end of the road for Masis who is set to face a group of male aspirants for the Endebess Parliamentary in Trans Nzoia County in the 2013 General Election.

After losing the East Africa Legislative Assembly seat to Patrick Mutuku, with whom she holds membership in Wiper Democratic Party, Masis is sure that no man will beat her in the competition for the Endebess parliamentary seat, a new constituency which she is aspiring to capture through Ford Kenya Party.

A fearless Masis says: "I was born and brought up in Endebess and I am ready to battle it out."

This will be her third attempt at elective elections having contested Kwanza constituency in 2002 and 2007, losing it to the incumbent Forestry and Wildlife Minister Dr Noah Wekesa.

The Endebess seat is among the new 80 constituencies that have been created in the just-concluded delimitations of electoral parliamentary and civic boundaries by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). It was shelved off Kwanza Constituency.

Masis will face off a team of male rivals who include Dr Nathan Psiwa, Dr Robert Pokose, former nominated MP Samuel Moiben, former Kitale Mayor Joshua Werunga and Engineer Richard Chesebe.

Competition

According to Pokose who spoke on behalf of the men, they are welcoming women participation in Endebess for a competitive and healthy voting. "We are ready to face her," said Pokose.

Having been brought up in Endebess, Masis is familiar with the terrain. "I understand the challenges facing the local communities and that is why I have chosen to represent them to the authorities through the National Assembly," Masis says. She reiterates: "I also want to unite and bring them under one umbrella of peace, prosperity and development."

Masis cites road network, resettlement of the landless and squatters, colonial displacements, forests evictions, improved education and social economic entrepreneurship as some of areas that provoked her to seek political representation in parliament.

A strong advocate for women's rights, Masis fought for the affirmative action that is entrenched in the new Constitution.

As an executive member of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO) Masis will be joining other women aspirants eyeing various seats within the Trans Nzoia County where leadership has been male dominated.

Breaking away from the tradition where women have shied away from contesting elective posts, the women have vowed to compete with men for the seats of MP, Senate and County representative apart from their selected women representative's position.

No woman showed interest for the governor's position that attracted the largest number of candidates who include Wekesa of ODM, Patrick Khaemba (Ford Kenya), businessmen Joel Gesuka (TNA) and Kakai Bisau (New Ford Kenya).

Having been the Maendeleo ya Wanawake chairperson in the county, Masis also steered Trans Nzoia Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) shows to greater heights of development.

"I have no doubt I know all the corners where the votes are," Masis who will this time around be vying for the Endebess seat on Ford Kenya ticket.

"I am leaving no chance to anyone. My record stands for itself and rest assured Trans Nzoia men and women will hate the cast their



Jennifer Masis, candidate Member of Parliament Endebess Parliamentary seat on Ford Kenya Party. Picture: George Omonso

votes to the losing side," she says.

Born in the Sabaot community, Masis comes from a background where girls' education has not been given importance. However, she was lucky to have had a father who educated both boys and girls alike.

Luck

Masis went to Kebee Primary School and then joined Kibuk Girls' Secondary School where she studies from Form One to Four. She later joined Lugulu Girls' High School for her 'A' Levels.

After Lugulu she was employed by the Kenya Posts and Telecommunication Corporation. It was here that she developed an interest in accounts and through the Kenya College of Communications and Technology (KCCT) she was able to study all the four stages of the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) courses.

She worked at KPTC between 1990-1996 and joined Jomo Kenya College for Agriculture and Technology to graduate with a Diploma in Community Development and Human Resource. She then went ahead to build her computer skills through the DALC Education institute. She then went ahead to study for her Bachelor of Art in Community Development from DALC and graduated in 2011.

It is through this course that she developed a passion for community work. Upon graduating, she became very vocal in encouraging her community to give the girl child an opportunity to go to school.

"It was not easy but it had to be done. Women were very supportive because they could see

that education had improved me, made me a different person," Masis explains.

Masis also played a major role in rewriting of the new Constitution and during the Constitutional reform process talks held at the Bomas of Kenya, she was at the forefront.

In Bomas she was given a decision making position as chair of the Transitional and Consequential Committee. In this position she was in a position to give insights to the talks based on her experience.

This was also a defining moment for her because in 2005, a fierce fire had begun in her community, in the name of a militia group that took root in the Sabaot community reigning terror and havoc in her people.

"The Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) began making its presence felt and there was a lot of violence. In deed their grievances were

"Elders are key to the initiation and success of any process in my community. It is through them that I communicated with Sabaot Land Defence Force."

— Jennifer Masis

legitimate, we are a marginalized community. Mt Elgon is the only region in Kenya with no roads," she explains.

"The region also performs the worst in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education dimming any chances of a better future for our children. However, violence was not going to make our lives better," Masis reiterates.

It forced her to approach the elders, proposing to them the need to set up of peace committees.

"Elders are key to the initiation and success of any process in my community. It is through them that I communicated with Sabaot Land Defence Force," Masis explains.

"With the help of the then District Commissioners in Trans Nzoia West, Kwanza and Mt Elgon, I managed to get the Ministry of Internal Security to develop amnesty letters that would be given to members of this terror group in exchange for firearms."

This happened between 2005 and 2007. Meanwhile, she continued with her work of denouncing FGM as well as working with women organisations such as the Rural Women Peace Link and the Caucus for Women's Leadership to build the capacity of women for them to break out of their cocoons.

Achievements

Masis has been sitting in boards of various organisations among them the Betting Control and Licencing Board under the office of the Vice President between 2009- and 2012. She was forced to resign to pursue her political ambitions. She is also a board member of the Centre for Multi-Party Democracy (CMD). However, this organisation has not stopped her from being part of it even as she ventures into elective politics.

Even as she seeks the Endebess seat, Masis know that the journey to get a nomination ticket is not easy. She recalls when she was denied an opportunity to represent her people in 2002 even after having presented her certificate to the Electoral Commission of Kenya.

"I immersed myself into the world of politics and in 2002 ran for a parliamentary seat in Kwanza Constituency."

It is an experience that the mother of five will never forget. "In spite of the great support I enjoyed from key players, my family, elders and supporters, the road to the election date was marred with threats and intimidation," she explains.

She adds: "I was subjected to all manner of abuses. I was even told that 14 youths would be sent to rape me. But even these insults meant to deface me as a woman did not discourage me from what I had set out to do. I kept going and even won the party nomination on a KANU ticket."

All seemed to work in her favour. She even presented her papers to the Electoral Commission, but little did she know that this was the beginning of the end.

Interest

"I received a phone call soon after that the party's executive had decided that they were not interested in women's leadership and that the number two at the party nomination would take my place," Masis explains.

"I was very surprised but stood my ground until I received another phone call from one of the most powerful politicians who did not mince his words. He said that not only was he not interested in women's leadership but reminded me that I was young at 32 and I had an entire future to pursue my dream."

The nomination certificate was given to somebody else even though it rightfully belonged to her. She took the matter to court but the Electoral Commission had already completed its work of receiving papers from aspirants. This action shut her out completely.

She notes that even this time around she will fight to the last man standing. "Though the field is big and wide, I have prepared enough to face the men of all qualities and experience," says Masis.

Jebii Kilimo takes on another gamble ignoring party wave in Rift Valley

By RAY LIMO

Linah Jebii Kilimo is arguably the only if not one among the few women who have made a mark in Marakwet politics in a short time.

Traditionally, politics in the Kalenjin land was a preserve for men but Kilimo defied the odds to become the first woman MP for Marakwet East Constituency.

Kilimo who was a banker resigned and gave a shot at the murky career. She was first elected to Parliament in 2002 under Narc ticket despite the fact that Rift Valley was predominantly in Kanu.

In the 2007, she repeated the same feat when she was re-elected on a Kenda party ticket despite a strong ODM wave in the region.

Kilimo was elected to Parliament on a Kenda ticket but was declared partyless by the Registrar of Political Parties after it failed to fulfil the requirements of the Political Parties Act.

Her constituents advised her to defend the parliamentary seat in the next elections on a The National Alliance Party after they were short-changed in United Republican Party.

Allegations

However, URP dismissed the allegations as fabrications that the party hoodwinked her and insisted she left after she was denied the direct nomination she had sought.

"Like in 2002 and 2007, I contested on parties chosen by the constituents. I have to listen to them and run on a TNA," she said.

Kilimo believes that electorate in Marakwet East elect performing leaders and not parties. This perhaps could be the reason behind her success in politics.

Kilimo believes that she is an MP as a calling, whether there will be a political wave or not in the expansive Rift Valley which URP stronghold.

An assistant minister Co-operative Development, she says her people know what she has done in the area.

Asked whether she fears that the influence of Ruto and URP could affect her, Kilimo said: "Let the people decide and I will respect their will."

Interestingly, even in 2007, Ruto was behind the wave in ODM but overcame the euphoria that vanquished some of the MPs in the region.

She maintains that her leadership over the last ten years in Marakwet "speaks for itself" citing her efforts to restore security in the once volatile region where cattle rustling and banditry was rampant.

Strength

Kilimo, a no nonsense politician is set to be URP's additional headache in the North Rift as it whips the region to support Ruto's political aspirations.

Her defection seems to have given energy to other leaders in the region who defied the Ruto and URP wave to remain in the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

This is why it will be interesting to see how Ruto will manage the divided North Rift political house as the 2013 General Elections inch closer.

Kilimo's campaigns focuses on a number of issues some of which she initiated and seeks to implement them in the next government should the constituents give her another chance.

The 50-year-old mother of five has been instrumental in bringing a lasting peace between the Marakwet

and the neighbouring communities.

Apart from addressing insecurity problem in the area, Kilimo is also steering the anti-female genital mutilation campaigns in Marakwet.

She introduced the FGM Bill 2010 that outlined strict legislations which has now seen the practice decline with overall prevalence reducing significantly.

The new law seeks to prohibit the practice safeguard against violation of a person's mental or physical integrity through the practice and for connected purposes.

Kilimo seeks to improve overall infrastructure in the area which had been overlooked by successive government administrations since independence.

It is undoubtedly true that the larger Marakwet is the only district in Rift Valley that had no single tarmac

"Like in 2002 and 2007, I contested on parties chosen by the constituents. I have to listen to them and run on a TNA."

— Linah Jebii Kilimo



Jebii Kilimo is confident that she has her peoples' support and can win through any party despite what is deemed to be the current trend. Picture: Ray Limo

road until the Kibaki government that tarmacked a section of it.

Though Kilimo's opponents bank on her inability to implement education to the letter during her two terms in Parliament, she believes she has helped uplift its standards especially education of the girl-child.

Her political opponents opposed her running for office on the grounds that she had not been circumcised and so was not fit to hold public office.

Projects

While at the helm of Co-Operative Ministry, her critics say she has done little to secure market for farmers to cushion them from incurring huge losses year-in-year out.

However, the MP maintains that she seeks another term to implement some of her remaining projects even as she advised her people to make informed decisions.

Kilimo, who is an alumni of State House Girls' High School, holds a Bachelor's degree in Community Development from the Kenya Methodist University.

She has been burning the midnight oil to ensure hundreds of squatters who were evicted from Embobut Forest are resettled as well as secure employment for a number of youth.

And despite all these, her political comeback would not be a walk in the park as youthful politicians are making a plot to end the career.

She would also have to grapple with last year's National Taxpayers Association (NTA) report that rated her constituency among the poor performers in terms of CDF management.

Though she dismissed the report, it disclosed that close to KSh16 million of the funds cannot be accounted for and or were allocated to ghost projects.

The race is crowded with potential candidates keen to capture the seat though Kilimo says she has already sharpened her arsenal ready to face the opponents at the ballot.

Many are would be keeping an eye on how Kilimo would be fairing on with her challengers come the historic elections on March 4.

Nteere seeks to strengthen the family unit

Continued from page 10

With case examples of Kithithina and Maritati dispensaries, Nteere says past leadership has failed to engage with the residents in agenda drafting to prioritise their major needs.

She gives an example of two dispensaries which were constructed in 2004 and completed in 2009 but have never served the community.

Understanding

Nteere has interacted with the community immensely and knows what needs to be done for the constituency to be comparatively competitive to attract local and international investors.

"Without good leadership we

might remain in the same position and what we need is a visionary leader who is people oriented, who has the feelings of the people at heart, compassionate and mindful of education matters," observes Nteere.

The constituency is currently facing acute water shortage despite having vast landscape which could easily offer an easier way of tapping water runoffs to big dams and in turn facilitate irrigation in the dry zones.

Nteere says she will seek to encourage residents to tap all water in their households in tanks and small water pans which can help them conduct small irrigation projects in their households.

Once elected alongside her Al-

liance Party of Kenya counterparts Kiraitu Murungi (Senator) and Peter Munya (Governor), the large idle tracts of land in the constituency will be turned into a food basket for the Meru County and feed the upcoming Isiolo resort city.

She hopes to guide in proper land management where she will seek to have all outstanding disputes resolved by fastening the process of land ownership documents.

Agriculture

According to Nteere, this will help residents to fully exploit their potential without fear or threats of being vacated in future.

Considering the family bond-age strength, she seeks to empower

the family by working with women whom are the backbone of society.

"Kenya is made of a family without which there would be no nation. Without women no society can develop. Women are in all sectors of development and they run the day to day affairs of the nation," she says.

Her leadership will be considering the key factor of a developed society which is tapping into the youth who have diverse abilities that can generate wealth for the constituency.

"Besides, the youth will be a key factor in leadership where we will work as a team by identifying various responsibilities where they will be responsible for steering our economic activities," says Nteere. She

notes: "We want every one of them to be productive and avoid those who just idle. Everybody has a responsibility in this society and what I want is to exploit that and improve their lives."

She also calls upon every leader seeking an elective position to behave responsibly and promote peace in their campaigns. She urges them to avoid using the young people by buying them alcohol to chant their slogans but instead engage them in positive activities.

"We want a united Buuri Constituency, leaders should not split our society because they will need it even after the elections. We need to ask ourselves where we will be after the elections," she said.

It doesn't matter who you are, or where you came from. The ability to triumph begins with you. Always."

— Oprah Winfrey

"You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try."

— Beverly Sills

Woman aspirant has the solutions to Budalangi problems

By LEONARD ACHARRY

Voters in Budalangi Constituency, better known for its perennial flooding problem than anything else, have a new entrant to the crowded race.

Constantine Obuya Ogunga has her eyes on the parliamentary seat whose outgoing holder is Sports minister, Ababu Namwamba, who is defending it on an ODM ticket.

If elected, she has promised to work closely with the Government and foreign partners to address the problem of floods emanating from Nzoia River once and for all.

Most Kenyan are used to seeing news stories on television of flood victims in Budalangi constituency, year in year out, after the banks of River Nzoia burst, forcing water into the homes of the helpless residents.

Ogunga has made history by being the first independent candidate

in Busia County and also the only woman vying for the hotly contested seat.

Her rivals are Water development minister, Raphael Wanjala, under UDF party, and Engineer David Achoka of Ford Kenya.

Indeed, as majority of politicians were scrambling for party tickets to sponsor them for the forthcoming polls; Ogunga had no worry and went on with her plans on how to clinch the Budalangi seat.

She is vying for the hotly contested seat as an independent candidate which she believes will enable her to get to Parliament.

Qualifications

Ogunga holds a diploma in Computer Science the Kenya Polytechnic She has also pursued advanced courses in Information Technology from the Institute of Data Processing Management (UK). She is currently pursuing her

Master of Science degree in Information Systems Management at the University of Liverpool, in the United Kingdom.

The parliamentary candidate is an expert in community development and gender training and has worked as the Chief Executive Officer of the African Centre for Women, Information and Communications Technology (ACWICT), a technical body that is expert on ICT for development and gender in Africa.

In addition to her impressive academic and professional background and world of experience, she is widely travelled, participating in information society and ICT for development forums.

"With all this experience, I know that I am the best candidate for the seat and I hope to go through," Ogunga says with confidence.

If elected, she will focus her energy to coming up projects to empower youth and women, who she says their plight are due to lack of good leadership and proper planning.

The CEO also plans to initiate development projects that will help locals boost their incomes in business; expand their competitiveness in the labour market and support agricultural productivity in the area.

"Our people have remained poor



Constantine Obuya Ogunga believes she can make a great difference in the lives of Budalangi residents if elected.

Picture: Correspondent

"Our people have remained poor for a long time and nobody has cared about them. I have decided that I will help them and ensure they are uplifted."

— Constantine Obuya Ogunga

for a long time and nobody has cared about them. I have decided that I will help them and ensure they are uplifted," Ogunga says.

The soft spoken IT expert has

been criss-crossing the constituency which borders Lake Victoria, addressing issues that resonate with the ordinary villagers in the vast constituency.

Psychologist joins race for Taita Taveta women's rep race

By BENSON MWANGA

Voters in Taita-Taveta County will be spoilt for choice for a women's representative as they cast their votes next month.

One of the candidates is Anna Nyambu, who is vying under a United Republican Party (URP) ticket is fondly referred to as "a woman of the people" by her supporters and admirers because of her generosity and development record.

The County, in Coast province, is made up of four constituencies, namely Mwatate, Taveta, Voi and Wundanyi.

The most visible woman candidate in the County is Dr Naomi Shabaan, the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Development, who is vying for the Member of National Assembly Position.

Another prominent woman in the County is former Central Bank Deputy Governor, Jacinta Mwatela, who is vying for the powerful office of the County Governor against nine men.

Her husband, Calestus Mwatela, is the outgoing MP for Mwatate and Education Assistant minister.

In the race for the women's representative, Nyambu has endeared herself to the electorate well.

Many people interviewed say they love her because she fulfils what she says.

"I made sure that the few positions I served in benefited the local community in areas of training and employment. I tried my best to assist the poor to access education and health," she says.



"I believe that I am the best suited to address the high unemployment rate among the youth, if elected."

— Anna Nyambu

Making her debut into the murky world of politics, Nyambu says she is confident of clinching the seat by virtue of having helped scores of men and women secure admission at the various medical colleges and get jobs in various institutions where she worked.

"I believe that I am the best suited to address the high unemployment rate among the youth, if elected," she says.

Failed leadership

The soft spoken psychologist is a former employer of East African Portland Cement Company among other firms where she has worked in the past three decades.

Asked why she decided to plunge into politics, Nyambu says it was because she had realised that there was a vacuum as far as leadership was concerned.

According to her, Taita Taveta County's current crops of leaders have failed to aggressively articulate and address pertinent issues affecting the local community in national forums.

"For many years, leadership has been a preserve of men, but now many women are competing with them in elective positions in the March 4 general elections," she says.

Nyambu believes she is the best candidate having been born and raised in the County in Mwanda location, Wundanyi division.

She attended Muanda and Mulamba Primary Schools then went to Matuga Girls High School in neighbouring Kwale County between 1977-1980.

She was later admitted at Kenya Medical Training

College, in Eldoret, and obtained a Certificate in Nursing and a diploma in Clinical Medicine at Port Reiz College in Mombasa.

The psychiatrist crowned her academic pursuit with a degree in Psychology and Counseling from the University of Nairobi.

She also holds a diploma in Public Health and Epidemiology from the Kenya Medical Training College, in Nairobi. She is now pursuing a Masters degree in Public Health.

The 52-year old politician has actively participated in various national activities aimed at improving development in the country.

After leaving Portland, she decided to pursue greener pastures by engaging in business and politics. Nyambu has been conducting HIV/Aids awareness campaigns including providing guidance and counselling to the youth in and outside the County.

She blames infighting among local leaders as the cause of underdevelopment and rising poverty in the region.

According to the candidate, 66 percent of the local population in the County are living below the poverty line yet it is endowed with enormous resources like minerals, water and wildlife.

"It is an irony that our County is the third most endowed in the country, but third below in terms of poverty. A large population is also living as squatters on their own land," she lamented.

If elected, Nyambu says she will strive to unite local residents and leaders for faster development

"We must ensure that our people are empowered economically but that we also go ahead to improve their livelihood," she says.

Coast is all out for peaceful elections

By YUSUF AMIN

The Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) has laid down strategies on how to maintain peace in the General Election especially at the Coast where acts of violence and insecurity have been previously experienced.

The Commission is cooperating with the district peace committees across the country so that people may be informed on how to avoid conflict during campaigns and on the election day.

Addressing a District Peace Committee in Kilifi County recently the commission, Tecla Namachanja, the Commission's Vice-Chair reiterated the organisation's dedication to solving over 5,000 cases of historical injustices that have been faced by coastal people since independence.

Namachanja said that most of the historical injustices that are being handled were related to land, low education, marginalisation, sex tourism and drugs among other problems.

She expressed concerns that the squatter issue in the region was one of the sensitive matters that the Commission was on the run to ensure it was tackled with speed.

"The cases are being investigated by the Commission in order to act on them and bring justice to the people who were affected," said Namachanja.

Solution

She noted with concern that solving the cases would also enhance peace in the region. She asked coastal people to be patient as the cases they filed with the Commission were being handled.

She called on all political leaders in the region to reiterate peace especially when addressing campaign rallies.

The Commission called upon local political and religious leaders to cooperate with youth groups and other organisations that preach peace so that coastal communities can elect leaders peacefully to enhance good leadership in the county governments.

Commissioner Ahmed Farah who was at the meeting urged district peace committees to sensitise people in the region on the importance of liv-



Tecla Namachanja, Chairperson TJRC Kenya. Picture: Courtesy

ing in harmony with other communities.

Farah reiterated that an environment that has no peace may lead the region in extreme poverty since the business, agricultural and tourism sectors will be affected.

The Commission urged Kenyans to be patient and wait for the report of the historical injustices that will be release on May 4.

It also noted that it would make visits to all counties so that it can lay down measures to engage the communities in peace initiatives.

Awareness

On behalf of the district peace committees Reverend Fred Mangi chairman Kaloleni District Peace Committee, emphasised the need for more civic education on peace.

The participants noted that if the commit-

tees would conclusively address the pending and emerging land disputes that have for many decades been triggers of violence, conflicts in the region would be solved.

"People in the county should not be swayed by groups that are advocating for cession of the region since the Commission has promised to tackle our problems through recommendations to the Government," Mangi urged.

He asked political leaders to cooperate with the voters to conduct relevant peace activities targeting credible, inclusive fair and peacefully election.

Harold Mwatua, chairman Bahari District Peace Committee said they were already conducting peace missions meant to avert violence.

Mwatua noted that their main challenge was lack of funds which would facilitate their movement to remote areas where politicians are vigorously conducting campaigns.

Speaking to journalists at Mkoroshoni Village in Kilifi town, Harriet Osimbo, an official of Ujamaa Centre said her organisation in conjunction with more than 15 organisations under Tuvuke Peace Initiative were working at creating awareness on free, fair and peaceful elections.

She reiterated the importance of the Government to resolving land problems in the region so that area residents could acquire title deeds.

Women leaders in Kilifi County led by Maendeleo ya Wanawake Vice Chairperson Esha Said asked the African Woman and Child Feature Service and other organisations to conduct civic education to women on how they could enhance peace in the region.

Said noted that women can play a big role in peace building since they take many responsibilities in their families.

She asked the provincial administration to cooperate with women so that politicians preaching hatred can be charged before the law.

Kilifi County Supkem chairman Bakari Ali Nassib said that they were preaching peace in mosques so that the coming elections could be peaceful.

"We are targeting the youth since they are the ones who are used by politicians to cause violence," noted Nassib.

"The cases are being investigated by the Commission in order to act on them and bring justice to the people who were affected."

— Tecla Namachanja

Voters at the Coast warming up to polls

By REJECT CORRESPONDENT

Election fever has gripped Coast Province, just like in other parts of the country. Even some die hard officials and members of the outlawed Mombasa Republican Council, who had threatened to mobilise members to boycott the polls have since seen the light are either campaigning as candidates or party officials. Others are waiting to cast their vote to elect leaders of their choice.

This is in contrast to a few months ago when most parts of Matuga and Msambweni constituencies in Kwale County were a no go zone for most aspirants who were being told in the face never to carry out campaign in the area of the County that were perceived to be Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) strong holds.

"I had gone to ask them for their votes but they said that they respect me and

should go away in peace as Coast will not participate in the elections," said one councillor while several others claimed they had been forced out in some areas.

Support

However, according to Rashid Mraja MRC spokesperson those who were asking candidates to leave were not MRC members but supported their cause of not going to elections.

"We are not only saying that people should not vote but that election should not take place here," he said then. Most affected areas were Ngombeni, Waa, Kombani, Tiwi and Ukunda.

Voter's registration was also affected with both staff and the electorate being threatened not to participate. There were on the lookout for those going to the polling centres. There were also claims of people being threatened that their houses would be burn should they associate with elections.



Rashid Mraja, MRC spokesman with some Coast residents. Picture: Courtesy

However, currently things seem to have changed. Vehicles blazing with loud music and road shows are streaming the areas with most of those believed to be die hard members offering a hand in campaigning for their favourite candidates as well as putting banners and posters or even offering security services. Among those associated with MRC is Hatibu Mjaka Mtengo who was the organisation's Secretary General and is vying for Msambweni Parliamentary seat on a KADU-ASILI ticket.

Just about a month ago

some locals from Ngombeni did not know who would be their leaders as most aspirants had kept out of the area due to the threats.

Change

According to Amina Soud, IEBC South Coast Coordinator the threats have reduced but they are keeping vigil. "The big issue in Kwale has been MRC but now it has subsided and we are seeing them as part of us. In some areas it is not heard of and some of their members have voters' cards while others have been cleared to vie," explained Soud. She

Outlawed sect regroups head ahead of polls

By ALLAN MURIMI

Some members of the outlawed Mungiki sect in Nyeri are an unhappy lot due to infighting among them.

The infighting targets those who defected and are willing to rejoin the sect attacking those who do not want.

Former sect members are complaining of being harassed and or beaten by others. Addressing the media, the youth have threatened to form a vigilante group and revenge claiming several of them have been attacked with crude weapons.

"We are planning to attack Mungiki members if the Government does not take any action," said Ephantus Mwangi, a self-confessed former Mungiki member. Mwangi said there are some youth who had been injured in attacks by some of the sect's members.

Area police boss, Kirunya Limbitu, said two youth had been injured and the police had not taken any action. "There is nothing we can do because one youth who was assaulted picked a P3 form but he has not filled it. The other one is still in hospital and has not picked a form," noted Limbitu.

Assault

He said the police was waiting for the youth to fill the forms before investigations could start. Mohamed Kaburu, a former Mungiki member, said he was assaulted by active members of the sect on New Year's Eve outside a bar in Ruring'u Estate.

"Two men who are still members of Mungiki came looking for me and said they wanted me back. When I told them that I would never return, they started beating me up," Kaburu explained.

They claimed that they abandoned the sect after their former leader Maina Njenga asked them to dissolve but there are those who are now forcing them to rejoin the group.

Meanwhile, Osman Githaiga, a motor bike taxi rider said he was attacked on New Year's Eve and beaten by the sect members who wanted him back. He said that a gang of about 20 people found him as he was getting out of a bar in Nyeri town and started beating him up.

Githaiga recognised five as Mungiki members in the mob which destroyed his motorcycle and robbed him of his day's earnings.

Reformed

"They want us to follow the sect rules where we are not supposed to take beer so that they can take us back, but we are reformed and want nothing to do with them," said Githaiga.

The outlawed sect has had a difficult time recruiting new members and is now going after those that defected.

The sect has been tried recruiting new members in central region and has fought with vigilantes in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties.

In October last year, the sect members from Karatina in Nyeri County fought with the vigilantes in Kibirigwi. Matatu operators in Nyeri town have also expressed fears over the re-emergence of the outlawed sect around the bus terminus.

The sect members have taken over most of the matatu stages and are extorting money from the operators as they regroup.

Breaking the culture of ethnic hostility in Kenya

By ODHIAMBO ORLALE

The role of the over 96 licensed radio stations in promoting national unity and patriotism will be put to test during the on-going campaign period before the General Election. Indeed, radio is the most popular and accessible medium in Kenya with 95 per cent of Kenyans listening to it regularly. Nairobi has the lion's share of FM stations standing at 46. This comes in the backdrop of the 2007-2008 polls and post-elections violence which was blamed on incitement and hate-speech by politicians and some media houses, especially vernacular radio stations.

About 1,300 people were killed and over 600,000 displaced in Mombasa, Nairobi, Naivasha, Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu among other hotspots during the height of the violence that followed the disputed presidential elections pitting supporters of President Mwai Kibaki and ODM leader, Raila Odinga.

Since then, a journalist, Joshua Sang of KASS FM is among four Kenyans facing charges of crimes against humanity at The Hague in The Netherlands.

Suspects

The others are Deputy Prime Minister, Uhuru Kenyatta, outgoing Eldoret North MP, William Ruto and former Head of the Civil Service Francis Muthaura.

Uhuru and Ruto are in the presidential race on a Jubilee Alliance ticket, as presidential candidate and running mate.

It was with that in mind that the Media Focus on Africa and several partners organised a public forum dubbed Kenya Media Roundtable to discuss the role of vernacular radio stations in breaking the culture of ethnic hostility in the country. Three panellists included Millie Lwanga vice-chairperson National Cohesion and Integration Commission, Christine Nguku chairperson of Alternative Media Network and General Manager of Sifa FM and Prof Kimani Njogu, Kiswahili scholar and director of Twaweza Communications



Speakers at a Media Roundtable in Nairobi. The media has been accused of promoting hostility by use of divisive words. Picture: Odhiambo Orleale.

were invited to share their professional experiences with the audience at Alliance Francaise Auditorium in Nairobi during the monthly event.

Unifying tool

Some of the major issues that came up were that the vernacular stations should be used as a unifying and not divisive tool as we head towards the General Election. Other issues were concern about abuse of office by some politicians who own media houses and use them to campaign for themselves and their political parties; lack of professionalism by FM station reporters and presenters as well as poor regulation of the mostly privately owned vernacular FM stations by the Communications Commission of Kenya and the Media Council.

According to Terry Musau from one of the vernacular FM stations: "We lack professionalism and there

is disconnect between how we cover news and the reality. Most journalists lack ethical standards while on the other hand the owner of the station interferes openly by twisting news stories according to his or her wish."

She also blamed the misuse of vernacular FM stations by politicians who take advantage of the poorly trained and poorly remunerated journalists to intimidate and compromise them.

Culprits

Training institutions were also not left off the hook, with claims that some of them offer courses which last for as short as three months.

Another challenge was how to draw a line and balance between what the communities want and what the media owners want to be highlighted in the station.

Another participant said impar-

tiality was a challenge in a case where the owner of the media house was a politician and had taken a stand on a specific issue and demanded that it be covered according to his wish.

"Why are our watchdog institutions not working?" Musau asked.

Content crisis

It is in view of these concerns that Nguku revealed that she had also noticed what she described as "a content crisis in the media". This is a situation where the audience demands to talk about their issues and not of the media owner.

Nguku says that when she left KTN a decade ago to start her own vernacular FM station, she knew what she wanted but over the years she realised that professionalism was not respected by many Kenyan leaders, readers, listeners and viewers.

However, according to Lwanga there is need to educate the public

about the difference between vernacular (private) and community FM stations which have no advertisements and are funded by donors to give voice and faces to local issues in the targeted areas.

"NCIC emphasises on individual responsibility from day one. We must promote our values, patriotism and unity through legislation and effective use of the media," Lwanga noted.

On the way forward, Njogu proposed that all vernacular FM stations should be encouraged to have a 40 minute segment every day on Kiswahili news and call-in session to promote the national language and nationalism.

"All local languages are protected and treated equally under the new Constitution, what you should put in a language is what can unite and not divide us as a nation using the media," Njogu reiterated.

Share intelligence on Rhinos, countries asked

By ALLAN MURIMI

An international wildlife conservation group has challenged countries where rhino poaching has escalated to share their intelligence to curb the trend.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Species Survival Commission (SSC) and Africa Rhino Specialist Group said the trend will be reduced through inter-governmental sharing of intelligence.

The group chairman Dr Mike Knight said the governments should work together and target the 'international syndicate' that is dealing with wildlife poaching.

Speaking during the group's eleventh meeting in a Nyeri hotel, Dr Knight noted that the syndicate is properly organised and asked Kenya, South Africa and Tanzanian to work as a team.

"There is an immediate need to share intelligence on poaching trends between the governments to prevent poachers from accessing the rhino and elephant populations," said Dr Knight.

He said that the country is losing its rhino population at the same level with South Af-

rica adding that the killing of wildlife is being driven by an increased demand in the south eastern Asia countries.

Forestry and Wildlife minister Noah Wekesa admitted that weak legislation has played a key role in enhancing the killing of rhinos and elephants in the country.

"Sophistication of wildlife crimes and inadequate human, financial and technological resources and in some instances weak wildlife legislation have led to increase in poaching," he said.

MOU

Wekesa revealed that the country recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with South Africa on conservation aimed at ensuring a continental voice on wildlife conservations.

South Africa which has the highest population of rhinos in the world and lost 668 of the animals last year while Kenya lost 29.

"We have to use diplomatic channels to reduce the demand for the rhino horn through engaging Asian countries as a united continent," said the minister.

Wekesa said the government has put in a

proposal to the next CITES COP 16 to consider placing a temporary halt on exportation of hunted trophies.

He noted the proposal will have implications in the hunting industry but asked countries that allow hunting as a sport to support it to save the rhinos and seal loopholes for legal trophies supplying an illegal market.

KWS senior assistant director in charge of species management and conservation Patrick Omondi said killing poachers without catching their sponsors has not deterred poaching.

"We have already asked the government for KSh1.5 billion to buy more sophisticated equipment and a further KSh600 million for training," he said.

The country recently established a Forensic and Molecular laboratory at the Kenya Wildlife Headquarters and rolled out the DNZ index system to profile the rhinos.

Kenya has the third highest number of rhinoceros in Africa with 631 black rhinos and 390 Southern White rhinos which were introduced recently.

The minister warned KWS officers who may be working in collaboration with poachers of severe punitive action.



A rhino calf resting inside a pen. There is urgency to share intelligence on poaching to conserve the dwindling numbers of elephants and rhinos.

Picture: Reject Correspondent

Women boycott Valentines Day to stop GBV

By CAROLYNE OYUGI

As people all over the world were busy celebrating Valentines Day this year, women and those who support them boycotted the lovers day to stand and talk against Gender Based Violence.

In Kenya, women from different organizations and communities met at Central park to stand, strike and dance.

This event comes at a time when according to the United Nations, one of every three women on the planet will be physically or sexually abused in her lifetime.

In countries experiencing conflict, the situation is even worse. For example, 1100 women are raped everyday in Congo.

According to the Kenyan police statistics, every dawn, five children wake up defiled, three people end up dead and two women are raped.

Violence against women takes physical, sexual, psychological and economic form. Rape is one of the worst ordeals that could ever happen to a woman or a girl child.

While addressing the attendants, Esther Passaris who is a candidate for Women Representative Nairobi County, said women and girls who experience violence suffer a range of health problems and their ability to participate in public life is diminished.

"You cannot expect a woman who is physically abused and as a result has psychological problems to perform well in her family and community at large," she said adding that some women are not abused physically but are not healthy because of psychological trauma they undergo.

Rape

Violence against women harms families and communities across generations and reinforces other forms of violence in society.

Rape is one of the worst ordeals that could ever happen to a woman or a girl child. The aftermath of this barbaric ordeal is even worse considering that they are exposed to Sexually Transmitted Diseases too.

It is sad to note that these cases have recently been on the increase. According to FIDA -Kenya, it is estimated that only 1 out of 20 women in Kenya will report rape and only 1 in 6 will seek medical assistance. This therefore means that these figures could be much higher than those recorded by police since many victims shy away from reporting this form of violation.

Some of the participants in this event were the survivors of Gender Based Violence. Sitawa Wafula a rape survivor however encourages the survivors of GBV not to give up in life. She believes in the phrase 'behind every mess is a message'.

"Before Sunday 15 June, 2003, I was a very lively jovial girl then I had to visit my boyfriend. His friend



spiked my tea and raped me," she explained, the memories still fresh in her mind.

"No one is better placed to use this phrase than me, I was raped when I was 18 years and although the experience almost tore me apart, I have grown over the stigma associated with the ordeal. I am now using strength as way of reaching out to other victims who are still in the closet," she said.

While most rape victims would want to forget, Sitawa is using her talent in poetry to reach women who think they are alone. She holds poetry workshops to life coaching especially for rape victims.

Poetry

Sitawa did not have someone to inform her of these things, and so she believes that she has a duty to do so for many people.

"I believe if someone was there for me maybe things would have been different but God says He has a reason for everything and I believe for me to go through all these things, He intended me to be that path for the many people I interact with."

She has learnt that people or circumstances cannot put her down unless she allows them to.

In her interview with Afroelle magazine, she Quotes Faith Evans' song, 'if I had to do it all again, I would not take away the pain because it made me who I am.'

She is also an activist for human rights, an Ambassador of Mental Health Awareness in Kenya, a blogger



Wapi Wapi dancers entertaining participants of One billion rising-Kenya at Central Park Nairobi. Below Esther Passaris Women Representative Nairobi County candidate addressing the crowd.

Pictures: Kaniaru Ndirangu

and teacher.

Not many survivors however are lucky to come out of such ordeals as strong people. Jane Mwendwa from Korogocho slum in Nairobi shared how her friend was beaten to death by her husband.

"If only she had walked out of that marriage in time maybe she would still be alive," said Jane with teary eyes.

Saida Ali, Executive Director CO-

VAW urged the government of Kenya and world over to stop treating the data they have as statistics but as beautiful and important women who have a right to security.

"Women die everyday due to diseases that can be treated, during child delivery and because someone has decided to be violent. All these can be stopped because governments can but they have just decided not to," she said while addressing the at-

tendants.

The campaign was started by Eve Ensler, the author of "Vagina Monologues" in response to the ever-rising incidents of violence against women and especially sexual violence.

The Nairobi event was organised by COVAW and involved speakers Slum Drummers and Debe Debe Drum Circle. There was also Karate demonstration by Karate Grannies on self defense.



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