Securing the political space
Challenges and Opportunities for women in 2022 elections
As political party primaries draw closer, focus is shifting to the political party lists which must comply with the gender equality provisions outlined in the Constitution. Parties that have in the past short-changed women when formulating the party list are now bound by the law to do so.

This follows a high court ruling directing political parties to align their party lists with the two thirds gender principle.

According to the ruling, all political parties must strictly adhere to the two thirds gender rule in the nomination of their candidates for the 290 constituency based elective positions for Members of the National Assembly and 47 County based elective positions for Members of the Senate.

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) has already indicated that it will adhere to the ruling and make sure political parties comply with the orders of the court. This means it will ensure that political party nomination lists comply with the two thirds gender rule before their lists of candidates are accepted by the commission for registration.

However, this remains a tall order. Wanjiku Muhia, an aspirant for the Kipipiri parliamentary seat is doubtful. She says that most...
political parties’ lists will not meet the two thirds gender rule.

She cites Nyandarua County which has registered very low numbers of women vying for the single member constituency seats. She says that she is the only woman vying for a National Assembly seat in a County that has five constituencies namely Kipipiri, Kinangop, Ol Jororok, Ol Kalou and Ndaragua. Similar patterns are replicated in other counties.

“In a whole county, there is one woman aspirant who is running for an MP seat. If this woman does not make it in the primaries, then all the five candidates running for MP seats in Nyandarua County will all be men. In my view, I feel the only way is to compel political parties to comply with the two thirds but now it becomes a tall order where there is no woman.”

Muhia who seats in the East African Legislative Assembly blames this on the political arena which she says is still not conducive for women. “I remember two months ago when I launched my campaigns, I did put a very big bill board at a convenient place in the market but it was taken stolen in less than 24 hours. The bill board had cost me Ksh50,000. When she erected another one, it was again stolen. She gave up. According to Muhia, this may not be verbal harassment but that is money lost. “I feel the political environment is still harsh but we should not give up.”

For Muhia, all political parties should consider giving direct party tickets to strong women candidates. “If opinion polls show that a woman is leading, there is no need of subjecting them to party nominations. They should be given direct tickets to demonstrate political goodwill in promoting women candidature.”

Similar sentiments are shared by Murang’a Woman Representative Sabina Chege who too feels that political parties should give direct nominations to strong female candidates vying for elective seats.

Chege says the move would help increase chances of having more women elected and boost gender balance in political leadership. “I know political parties can support us in getting more women on board and even support them financially where possible,” she said.

The two leaders spoke even as political parties unveiled a raft of measures to actualize the gender equality provisions in this year elections.

According to the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) women’s league leader and president Beth Syengo, the party will be conducting opinion polls to identify strong candidates. “In cases where female candidates take the lead, they will get direct tickets.”

This will apply for aspirants seeking to be Members of the County Assembly (MCA), Members of the National Assembly, Members of the Senate and Governors.

Syengo further notes that that in cases where opinion polls show two aspirants have a small gap between them then the party will determine who attains the ticket through a delegates system.

But in the event that two candidates tie, we will explore consensus and when that fails, we will move to the election by delegates or universal suffrage,” she explained during an interview with the Sauti Sasa.

Syengo says that a recent mapping exercise by the party established that more women are vying for different elective seats. Majority are popular on the ground and therefore they are likely to fly the party flag in respective elective positions.

“Right now we have more than 500 women who have come out to vie for different seats and we are hoping they will be in the list of candidates submitted to IEBC after the party primaries.

The Women League leader is optimistic that the revised nomination rules will deliver the two thirds gender rule in elective positions. “Both the secret ballot and party primaries are to be used as a last resort mechanism where dialogue fails. I therefore expect the nomination process to be
free and fair and leave more room for women to win the party ticket.”

She is quick to point out that previously the nomination rules were not gender sensitive. “But now the rules have been revised to embrace transparency which we expect to work in favour of women.”

ODM nomination fee has also been lowered by half for women in a bid to increase their candidature in the polls, according to Syengo. For instance, women vying for an MP seat are paying Ksh125,000 as compared to Ksh250,000 by their male opponents.

She asserts that the party through the women league has also embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at ensuring that more women seek elective seats. “We have developed a training manual for the women candidates and done a lot of capacity building to ensure they win during the polls.”

“We are also helping out 30 women who we have not only paid their annual membership fee but waived their nomination fee as a party. In addition, we plan to pay their fee to IEBC to make sure the numbers go up.”

She says that the party targets to deliver ten women governors, ten women senators and twenty single constituency MPs in the August polls. At the county level, they are targeting an average of five women Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) per county.

The United Democratic Alliance (UDA) has also adopted similar measures to increase women candidature. In addition to lowering their nomination fee by 50 percent, the party has set up a disciplinary tribunal to hear cases of unfair competition that most of the time hurts women participation in political processes.

According to Veronica Maina who is the party Secretary General, if a woman candidate is harassed particularly by a UDA member who is also an aspirant, that aspirant will lose the candidature.

Joyce Majiwa of FIDA says the ongoing efforts are good and commendable. “It is for us now to decide that we are going to vote for the women to fulfill the constitutional gender threshold.”

She says FIDA will be keen to make sure that party lists meet the two thirds gender principle. “Political Parties must comply with the high court ruling and submit lists that meet the gender threshold. IEBC must reject any lists that contravene the ruling.”

A former commissioner with the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) Priscilla Nyokabi is emphatic that political parties participating in the August polls must conform to the high court ruling.

According to Nyokabi who is also vying for the Nyeri Senatorial position, political parties should not be allowed to participate in the elections unless they fulfill the two thirds gender rule.

“The ruling has renewed our hope to attain the two thirds gender rule and therefore women can now come out in large numbers and contest for elective seats.”

“If a political party is fronting 47 governors, they must have 16 of them as women. If you front 290 candidates for parliament, then you have to put in 97 women and therefore women must come out in large numbers to contest and be in the party list.”

Nyokabi says the only area of contention is ensuring that political parties nominate women to winnable positions in party strongholds.

“If Jubilee puts women in the Nyanza list where Jubilee has no roots and ODM has equally put women of ODM in Central, we are saying we will sort ourselves out when we are on the list because party tickets are extremely important.”

The message of women candidates to IEBC is that it must reject party lists that do not meet the two thirds gender rule on 28th April, when parties present names of candidates who will contest in the General Elections.
Whoever coined the phrase democracy is not cheap, was spot on and may have been having the Kenyan women aspirants in mind.

Most women eying the six elective seats in the August 9, 2022, General Election have too many hurdles such as lack of political goodwill, male chauvinism and an uneven playing field. But one major hurdle is lack of campaign funds.

The aspirants are expected to have sufficient funds for the campaigns, and to purchase branded items like T-shirts, umbrellas, caps and posters. These are not cheap and once bought and dished out to supporters, there is still no guarantee of being elected.

Then comes the payments that have to be made to the political parties. The party nomination fees range from a whopping Shs1 million for a presidential candidate to Shs500,000 for anyone eying the Governor’s seat; about Shs250,000 for the Senator; Kshs 200,000 for a County Women Representative; Kshs100,000 for MP and Kshs50,000 for a Member of County Assembly.

Next in line are the costs to IEBC. Last year, in August, IEBC caused an outrage when it announced that it had hiked the nomination fees. Leaders like Narc Kenya chairperson, Karua, told them off terming the move as illegal, unfair and unacceptable.

The revised rates rose from about Kshs10,000 to a staggering Kshs1 million for a presidential candidate; and Kshs250,000 for parliamentary candidates, with women, youth and the disabled given a rebate to pay Kshs150,000.
The former tough-talking Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister had protested saying the move was not only unlawful and discriminatory, but was out to make vying a preserve for the rich.

“The Electoral Commission is proceeding from a very wrong premise because they sound like they think they are a business enterprise. We need to go back to more sensible fees,” says the former Gichugu MP and Kirinyaga gubernatorial candidate.

These costs intimidate women who want to get into politics or hamper the progress of those already vying for political positions. The good news is that due to pressure and lobbying by women leaders, most political parties have since slashed the nomination fee by half for women candidates and people living with disability.

Still, women aspirants have to confront many other costs.

To hold rallies, for instance, they have to pay the mobilisers to rally people to attend meetings. They also have to pay allowances to group leaders of women, youth, and elders to get their support, among other hidden costs.

Then comes the cost of advertising and public relations in the mainstream media and branding themselves by printing campaign posters, T-shirts and banners. Advertisement in leading print media ranges from Kshs90,720 for an eighth page in colour to a whopping Kshs887,000 for a full page in colour.

Broadcast media is even more expensive. For the television slots range from an average of Kshs15,000 for five-seconds slot to Kshs324,000 on prime time, to Kshs105,000 per 30-minutes slot; and Kshs210,000 for a 60-minute slot on prime time.

National FM Radio adverts range from Kshs350,000 for 14 adverts per week and Kshs235,000 in vernacular stations depending on when the adverts will air.

Indeed, democracy is not easy as viewed by former United States President Franklin Roosevelt, who said: “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choices are prepared to choose wisely.”

For most women aspirants, these high costs make the political landscape unfavorable for many of them. This is despite the recently enacted Political Parties Amendment Act that attempts to lessen the pain.

Recently, figures were released of how much it costs to vie for various political positions. It is estimated that to run a successful campaign, a contestant for Governor’s position will require about Kshs50 million; those eyeing Senator’s office will need about Kshs35; those contesting the County Women Rep’s seat will cough Kshs22.8 million; contestant for MP will need about 18 million and an MCA aspirant about Ksh 3.5 million. This is not cheap by any standards.

As a reprieve for many women candidates, most of the registered political parties like Jubilee, Orange Democratic Party (ODM), United Democratic Alliance (UDA), Wiper Party, Ford Kenya, Narc Kenya, Narc, and Amani National Congress (ANC) among others have halved the nomination fee for women and people living with disabilities as an incentive to have more on board.

For instance, women aspirants for the gubernatorial seat are being charged Ksh250,000, half of what their male counterparts are paying; while those going for the senatorial seat are parting with about Ksh150, 000, half of what their male rivals are paying.

There have been proposals that one of the ways to make politics attractive to and less costly for women is to get women to lead political parties. It is hoped that when in leadership, the women will formulate policies that will make politics less prohibitive to other women.

At the moment, of the about 83 registered political parties in the country, very few are led by women. These include the National Rainbow Coalition – Kenya (Narc-Kenya) of Martha Karua, and National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) of Charity Ngilu, who are former Presidential candidates.
Violence against women in elections the greatest barrier to realizing their political rights

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

The UN Women alongside UNDP’s programming guide is providing a well-researched and analyzed tool as a framework in the prevention and response to Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE).

Titled “Preventing violence against women in elections: programming guide” out of experiences collected from more than 40 countries over several years, the tool is intended for use by policy makers, practitioners and a wide range of electoral stakeholders such as those in human rights and the Civil Society Organizations (CSO).

The experiences and examples contained within the Guide reveal that violence against women in elections and violence against women in politics more broadly is a violation of women’s fundamental human rights and freedoms. The Guide also makes clear that if appropriate actions are taken, these forms of violence can be eliminated.

UN Women asserts that “women’s participation in politics, as voters or candidates,

has never been as high as it is today where over 10,000 women serve as national parliamentarians, millions of women politicians serve at sub-national levels and increasing numbers of women vote, run for office and actively participate in electoral management around the world.

But violence against women in elections has been used to discourage them from not only voting, but getting interested in competitive
“The most obvious motivation behind the violence is to discourage women from pursuing a political career or prevent their independent political participation. The practice of violence against women during elections is driven by gender-specific motivations and discrimination,” says the UN programming guide.

“Perpetrators of violence are reacting to women’s deviations from traditional gender roles, which may be perceived as threatening male-dominated power structures. Violence may prevent women from standing as candidates or winning competitive races for political office, discourage women from voting or punish them for being active in the electoral process.”

These acts of violence, the guide stresses, can be psychological, physical and sexual in nature and could also include “the loss of livelihood, intimidation, physical, sexual assault, residential displacement and murder.”

Those targeted by this form of violence include those working in campaign teams for women candidates, with the objective of intimidating and run them off the campaign trail. Training political campaigners, activists and community grassroots leaders can significantly help cushion women from violence within the political space.

Even though these are steps in the right direction, it is not enough as the numbers still fall short of the target of gender balance in decision-making set in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

Despite the practical and achievable targets to increase the representation of women in politics, women remain under-represented in all levels of government. Violence is one of the contributing factors.

“Few women are elected as governors, mayors or to other decision-making positions at local level, and they serve as head of state or government in less than 20 countries. Women face myriad challenges when they are exercising their political rights, the most alarming of which is the perceived increase in violence against women in politics, including violence against women in elections,” notes the programming guide.

Against this backdrop, gender-based violence in politics and elections, the UN finds is increasingly visible. It could involve escalation of various forms of violence against women in public life and gender bias, stereotyping and skewed scrutiny by the public and media.

In addition to violence, gender bias and stereotypes are hindering women participation in political and decision-making processes. For instance, questions about women as wives and mothers and the same questions are rarely pointed to men as husbands and children.

This creates the narrative that women are misplaced in political spaces because they have left their rightful places as nurturers. Men are accepted as natural leaders and are rarely seen through domestic lenses.

Such stereotypes and biases are reinforced time and time again creating strong perceptions that women on the campaign trails have deviated from their respectful roles in society and are therefore to be rejected by voters.

Some people use these stereotypes to justify violence against women especially during election time.

The UN Programming Guide observes that as elections are the main event by which formal political power is established and voting rights are realized, violence against women in elections remains the highest barrier to women realizing their political rights. But this need to be addressed as matter of urgency. The circle of stakeholders to help address violence against women in elections and violence against women in politics include working with elected leaders, voters, election staff, electoral candidates, ministers, public servants, members of commissions, unions and other public officials and more so, leaders of political parties to level the ground for women by building safe political spaces.
Electoral Violence: A threat to Kenyan women participation in elections

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

As Kenya’s general elections draws near, experts in sexual and gender-based violence are a worried lot. This is because of rising cases of electoral violence against women both offline and online.

They are now urging the government and security agencies to enhance the safety and protection measures, especially for women participating in the political contests and processes.

Elections and various forms of violence towards women have long been synonymous with the electioneering period. Perpetrators of this form of violence use it to intimidate women not participate in political contests as candidates, supporters, voters, or election officials.

Several studies including the most recent Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) shows that cases of SGBV are very high with those reporting to have been violated reaching almost 50 per cent.

“During elections, this number goes up as women find themselves cornered with politically instigated harassment, abuse, physical violence and sexual assault. These cases tend to increase just before, during and after elections,” says Angelica Muchiri, an activist on issues of SGBV and human rights.

“I grew up in Mathare slums and I know first-hand what happens to women when political leaders disagree or when they want to intimidate people to take a particular position. Women are the low hanging fruits when it comes to political violence.”

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Muchiri’s concerns are well documented in a report entitled “Breaking Cycles of Violence: Gaps in Prevention of and Response to Electoral-Related Sexual Violence in Kenya.”

“The objective was to build a body of evidence to identify gaps, document good practices and support the formulation of survivor-centred, short- and medium-term measures that should be prioritized by duty bearers, especially in the health, security and legal sectors, for effective prevention and response ahead of the next elections in 2022,” said Li Fung, Senior Human Rights Adviser at the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya.

The report is a brainchild of the UN Human Rights, UN Women and Physicians for Human Rights in Kenya to break the silence around election related sexual violence in Kenya during the 2022 electioneering period.

UN defines violence against women elections as violence against women in political life, including in and beyond elections, is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and/or by the State.

Violence is a recurrent and most pressing issue in Kenya going as far back as the 1990s. Sadly, over the years, this violence has increasingly taken on gender dimensions as women are hounded and harassed be they voters, political aspirants, candidates or even winners.

Muchiri notes that it is well documented that while women are increasingly abused behind closed doors, during an electioneering period, more and more spaces become increasingly unsafe for women and girls.

Says Muchiri: “We saw the other day a young lady being slapped in broad day light in a political meeting. She only happened to mention the name of a particular candidate and the man standing behind her reached out and slapped her twice. Nobody said a word. This video circulated on social media until it got the attention of security forces and we are encouraged by that quick action.”

Fortunately, adds Muchiri, existing legal and policy frameworks are very progressive, such that there is little ambiguity as to what physical violence means as it includes intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, injury or harm.

Physical violence further includes, but is not limited to, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, the use of restraints or one’s body size or strength against another person, and the use of or threat to use, a weapon or object. It may also include kidnapping and arbitrary detention, beating, stoning, and physical abandonment or displacement.

Research studies indicate that while social media is known as a platform that perpetuates violence, it also be used for a good cause. It can help to combat violence against women in an electioneering period.

“We need to use all available platforms to sensitize and educate the electorate that a society that is hostile to its women is also one that has lost its place in modern society.
- Angelica Muchiri, SGBV and human rights activist

“We need to use all available platforms to sensitize and educate the electorate that a society that is hostile to its women is also one that has lost its place in modern society. Today, a woman can aspire and rise to the highest levels of leadership in a sober country and we must work towards creating a conducive environment for this dream to come true for all women who dream it,” Muchiri concludes.
Women role models inspire women to leadership positions

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

Women aspirants for the six elective seats in the August 9 General Elections do not have to look far for role models, thanks to the many efforts undertaken by many players to get women into leadership and decision-making positions.

The aspirants for the coveted seats include veteran politicians and women leaders from all walks of life with a wealth of experience and skills on how to turn the country around as far as governance and leadership is concerned.

The women role models have positively influenced many women to see politics as a career and not only a sphere for men.

The three women Governors who were elected in 2017 broke the glass ceiling and sent the message that it is possible. They are former Cabinet Ministers Charity Ngilu (Kitui) and Anne Waiguru (Kirinyaga). The other was Dr Joyce Laboso (Bomet), who has since passed on. Before being elected to the governorship position, she was a former Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and Sotik MP.
Ngilu, a role model to many women, is a former Kanu official in Kitui County and has been in the political arena for over two decades. She was Kitui Central MP and a presidential candidate in 1997 elections, coming fourth after President Daniel arap Moi of Kanu, Mwai Kibaki of Democratic Party of Kenya (DP) and Raila Odinga of National Development Party (NDP).

Another is Martha Karua. In 2013, former Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, and former Gichugu MP, too joined the presidential race, sponsored by her party, Narc Kenya. She came sixth. She vied for the Kirinyaga Governor’s post in 2017, but lost to Waiguru.

Another woman leader and role model who has had a stab at the presidency is the late Nobel Laureate Prof Wangari Maathai. She was the founder of Greenbelt Movement and served as Tetu MP and Assistant Minister for Environment in the Kibaki government.

In 2017, three women Prof Margaret Kamar (Uasin Gishu), Susan Kihika (Nakuru) and Fatuma Dullo Adan (Isiolo) inspired more women when they were elected Senators. Prof Kamar and lawyer Kihika have now set their eyes on the coveted seat of Governor in this year’s elections.

Prof Kamar is a former Cabinet Minister, a former Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Moi University and Member of the East African Assembly. On her part, Lawyer Adan, is a former Nominated Senator, a former Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) Commissioner and is the current Deputy Majority Leader in the Senate.

Adan made history in 2017 as the first elected woman Senator in the North Eastern region where most elective seats have been the preserve of men.

These role models and trail-blazers have inspired lots of women to come out to vie in the 2022 general elections.

For instance, in the gubernatorial race are former Assistant Minister and Kathiani MP, Wavinya Ndeti (Machakos), Nairobi businesswoman, Agnes Kagure, and the current Nairobi Governor, Anne Kanaru are vying for Nairobi governorship position. Former Assistant Minister and Starehe MP, Bishop Margaret Wanjugi who had initially indicated her interest in the governorship will be vying for Nairobi senate seat.

They are not the only ones. Many more women are going for the big prize. They include outgoing Kwale Deputy Governor, Fatuma Achani, who is seeking to replace her boss; Homa Bay Women Rep, Gladys Wanga (Homa Bay) seeking the governorship position, Kilifi Township MP, Aisha Jumwa, who is a former Kilifi County Women Rep (Kilifi); Kajiado East MP, Peris Tobiko (Kajiado) going for governorship. In Kirinyaga, three women will be fighting it out for governor seat. They are the incumbent, Waiguru, former Gichugu MP Martha Karua, and current Women Representative Purity Wangui Ngirici.

It is hoped the huge interest women are having in the 2022 political contests will improve the numbers of those elected beyond the results of 2017.

In the 2017 polls, 47 women were elected as County Women Representatives, 23 as Members of Parliament and 97 as Members of the County Assemblies (MCAs).

Women role models have contributed so much to the attainment of these gains. And that is why on the eve of this year’s International Women’s Day, President Kenyatta, identified and gave women leaders aged over 70 years special awards for their selfless contribution to the women’s movement in the country since independence.
Kenyan women are participating in the 2022 elections against a backdrop of unresolved issues that continue to undermine women’s ability to actively engage in politics. Although women make a majority of voters in Kenya, they are inadequately represented in decision making positions.

According to Nusra Mwinyi, a Member of County Assembly (MCA) aspirant in Mtongwe ward, Likoni Sub county Mombasa, “Women face a myriad of challenges than men. As women politicians, we have to confront intimidation and propaganda, among other challenges. We juggle family and leadership roles, but male opponents use this issue to discredit women candidates’ appropriateness for politics.”

Religion has also played a role in discrediting women aspirants. “Being a Muslim woman, has also played a role in making vyng for political seats for women hard as religion is used to indicate that men should be in leadership and not women.” Ms Mwinyi says “This is changing though, we are slowly seeing a change in mentality as women are getting elective seats,” she adds.

Finances are also a big issue as their male opponents use their financial
muscle to gain political mileage. “The challenge of campaign financing is made worse by expectations of bribes, vote buying, and informal nomination fees within parties. Women politicians have to find some money to give the youth once you call for a meeting as it is expected,” she says.

Moreover women lack support from campaign fund raisers and volunteers who drive the campaign. Without doubt, most power brokers are men who are unlikely to support women at the party primaries. A clear example was Elizabeth Dole who withdrew from the Republican presidential nominations in year 2000 because she could not raise enough money for nomination campaign.

This has led to the development of pro women fundraising support groups that support women campaigns, including the UN Women Kenya that raises funds to empower women with skills to perform effectively in political processes. Socio-cultural resistance is also a barrier, along with perceptions about politics. Even the strongest women with proven agency in other areas hold back from politics. Women not being strong in politics is also contributed to lack of mentors as men occupy most positions. There is a mentorship gap, as there are few women political leaders compared to the thousands of potential female aspirants.

Hon. Charity Ngilu, Kitui governor, in an interview with African Woman and Child Feature Service, said that were it not for mentorship spearheaded by Professor Maria Nzomo and Professor Wanjiku Kabira of University of Nairobi she would not be where she is.

Political parties are the gatekeepers of politics in Kenya. In some areas one is “guaranteed” a position once they get the popular party nomination. Most women are rigged out of vying at the party nominations,” she adds.

Obstacles that stand in women’s way and bar them from actively participating in politics remain unresolved even as Kenyans head to another General Election this year. The best strategy to increase women representation in politics is to have favorable gatekeepers. Since gate keepers recruit people like them it becomes imperative that having women as party presidents albeit at the local level will culminate in more women participating in politics.

Indeed where gatekeepers have been women, there is a noted increase in the number of female candidates owing to the fact that female elites encourage other women to participate actively in politics. These gatekeepers also back policies that favour women or candidates who show female predispositions.

Traditionally, politics has always been male dominated, a structure which is both hostile and unwelcoming to women. In general, many societies are patriarchal and frown on women who try to change the status quo.

In addition to these challenges, Ms Mwinyi says insecurity for women vying for political seats is another matter. “Men will even organize gangs to attack you so as to intimidate and create fear. I am fearless, I will stand against my adversaries,” she says.

Women also have to contend with physical barriers like lack of resources, relatively lower levels of education, marginal access to information and more family responsibilities not to mention rights deprivation.

Domestic roles of women as care givers at the family level means they have limited time available to take up responsibilities that assist men gain skills necessary to pursue political careers. Women find themselves involved in non-political activities most of their time.

The other bidg challenge is the role of gatekeepers who determine who gets nominated by the party. As a way out, some analysts have pointed to deliberate allocation of party seats to men and women. To attain gender equilibrium parties should ensure that the list of every party’s candidates has either both men and women or allocate a definite percentage of slots to women. While this may be provided for in legal documents, its success heavily depends on the political will in the political parties.
The hundreds of women aspirants for the six elective posts in the August 9 General Elections have reason to smile after Federation of Women Lawyers - Kenya (FIDA-K) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with them to provide pro bono (free) legal services.

According to FIDA Senior Programmes officer, Sophie Kaibiria: “We will select a number of aspirants to benefit from the free legal services for those who are unable to afford to get themselves a lawyer to pursue their cases. We will then assign them a lawyer on request.”

Already the organisation, whose Executive Director is Anne Ireri, has recruited 400 individuals to act as anti-Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) monitors as the election season hots up.

The 400 will observe any cases of
violence against women aspirants and candidates during the campaigns, party primaries and General Election slated for August 9.

SGBV and Elections

In a newspaper advertisement, FIDA said: “The gender dimension of political violence in Kenya constitutes a major risk factor for the perpetration of SGBV committed during election process; GBV is considered a form of violence that hinders the realisation of women’s political rights in the electoral context.”

Those who were selected have since attended mandatory training provided by FIDA as being on standby to report any violence against women across the 47 counties. Other duties include attending campaign forums and rallies, furnishing FIDA-K with reports on status of human rights concerning compliance and violations as well as assisting and accompanying the organisation’s team on visits to various counties.

In a separate interview, the Programme officer says FIDA is aware from various reports generated from previous elections that many women leaders and politicians were disenfranchised from going into politics because of fear and the reality of political and Gender Based Violence (GBV).

Says Kaibiria: “GBV is one of the things that makes it impossible for women to get into politics and is an issue we are trying to address this year.”

The Kaibiria added that they have seen a gap when it comes to reporting, recording and evidence presentation to court from GBV in elections from party primaries and to the General Election itself.

After the 2017 polls, a damning report was released by the International Federation of Human rights (FIDH) and its member organization in Kenya, Kenya Human Rights Commission which highlighted testimonies of survivors, as well as significant impact of SGBV for survivors and families.

In it, the report exposed patterns of election-related SGBV against women in Kenya, including gang rape perpetrated by security forces, and shows that impunity prevails.

As the elections date nears and campaigns intensify, women aspirants are on the age fearing electoral violence. On its part, the judiciary and the security forces say they have made adequate preparation to nip the vice in the bud.

This is good news for women aspirants going for various elective seats. They include veteran politicians and women leaders from all walks of life with a wealth of experience and skills on how to turn the country around as far as governance and leadership is concerned.

In addition to the pro bono services, FIDA has also been holding training sessions in some of the 47 counties for aspirants on the does and don’ts in politics, security and strategy on how to use the media, campaign and public speaking.

Among the experts who have addressed some of the sessions are Kirinyaga Governor, Waiguru, Kisumu Women Representative Rosa Buyu and Members of Parliament Milly Odhiambo (Suba North) and Mishi Mboko (Likoni).

So far, there are three women Governor trail-blazers who were elected in 2017. They are former Cabinet Ministers Charity Ngilu (Kitui) and Anne Waiguru (Kirinyaga). The other was Dr Joyce Laboso (Bomet), who has since passed on. She was a former Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and Sotik MP. Other trail blazers in 2017 who were elected as Senators were Prof Margaret Kamar (Uasin Gishu), Susan Kihika (Nakuru) and Fatuma Dullo Adan (Isiolo).

In this election, many women are eying influential and powerful seats. Those going for governorship[ position include: Kwale Deputy Governor, Fatuma Achani, who is seeking to replace her boss whose second tern is ending; Homa Bay Women Rep, Gladys Wanga (Homa Bay), Kilifi Township MP, Aisha Jumwa, who is a former Kilifi County Women Rep (Kilifi); while in Kirinyaga three women will fight it out, they are the incumbent, Waiguru against former Gichugu MP, Karua, and current Women Rep. Wangui Gichiri.