

Delivering the Promise

Women stepout to prove women leadership brings change



I want to be the best performing governor who delivers on promises, Mbarire



BY FAITH MUIRURI

When Cecily Mbarire was nominated to parliament in 2003 as a young woman, she was little known in her county and in the country. Many people wondered if she had the energy to sustain her stay in politics. They thought it was just a matter of time before she gave up.

She proved them wrong. Mbarire went on to serve as a Member of Parliament for Runyenjes for 15 years. But her success in politics is not by chance. She has toiled for it every step. After being nominated to parliament, she worked very hard to endear herself to the electorate, engaging in many development projects that changes their lives. It paid off. In

2007, during very competitive elections, she was elected MP for Runyenjes. Again in 2013 general election, she retained her position, proving she was a force to reckon with.

But in the 2017 General Elections, Mbarire decided to compete for the Embu gubernatorial position. She was the first woman to do so. "I wanted something challenging but lost during the primaries which were marred by rigging and a lot of interference by the party which had preferred candidates. I was however nominated as an MP and served as the Deputy Majority Whip until 2020."

In the 2022 elections, she will be making her second attempt for the gubernatorial job on a United Democratic Alliance (UDA) ticket. Emboldened by

her campaign slogan *Kavinda ni gaka* which means time is now to change our leadership style, to have a people oriented government, and to have people centered services. The slogan further implies that time has come to give a woman leader a chance to show what the women can also do.

Being the youngest candidate in the race, her candidature has generated a lot of interest among the youth. "I am also banking on the women vote. I have built a strong connection with them and strongly believe they will vote for me. I have seen a lot of excitement by the women who feel I should be given a chance."

Mbarire's track record is one to envy. She is renowned for starting a women's bank in Runyenjes constituency during her term as an MP. The Runyenjes Women Trust Fund is one of the best performing village banks in the county and offers cheap credit facilities to women.

"Our membership has grown to around 7,000 women, both in groups and individuals, with a liquidity base of Ksh140 million from Ksh4.5 million in 2009."

The MP hopes to expand the reach of the bank if she is elected governor. The bank is playing a huge role in women empowerment and wellbeing of families. Mbarire is also credited with initiating water projects in the constituency. "I was doing this in phases. In phase one, I did a major irrigation project in Runyenjes Constituency where over 2000 farmers are currently doing irrigation and farming throughout the year. It is one of the most successful irrigation projects we have in Embu County."

She notes that phase two, which was to build Thuci water dam stalled because of challenges caused by government bureaucracy.

"I am confident we will be able to revive it when I win. We will also focus on three other dams that are critical for Embu County to be food sufficient and have their own income generating agribusinesses."

"My passion is to ensure women have access to clean water to reduce their burden of work at the village level."

Her other priority areas

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« **FROM PAGE 2** include revamping the health sector which she says is in a sorry state. “I will make sure the health sector is working, health facilities become operational, efficient, available and accessible to all the residents of Embu. I will improve services being offered at the level five hospital which is the largest in Embu County but facing myriad challenges right from management to corruption to just lack of basic services and equipment.”

Mbarire, who has been instrumental in steering reforms in both coffee and tea sector, will also focus on value addition of agricultural products. “I am looking at starting cottage industries to pave way for value addition for our milk, macadamia nuts, avocados and honey.”

If elected, she also wants to establish a department within the Ministry of Agriculture to create market linkages for farm produce. “This will help eliminate the middle men who exploit our farmers. I will also revamp the extension services to make sure farmers have access to the services.”

For cotton farming, she says she plans to provide inputs to farmers to revamp the sector and “create our own cotton factory in the county.”

Mbarire also has an agenda for young people. “I will make sure the county taps on existing Technical Training Institutes in Runyenjes, Mbeere South and in Manyatta to equip the youth with skills and make them self-reliant in all sectors. The county will offer them some credit facilities to enable them start their own businesses.”

“At least 30 per cent of all public procurement opportunities in the county will be reserved for youth, women and persons with disabilities. This will ensure that a considerable number of marginalized groups are able to win government tenders, which is key to economic empowerment.”

To achieve this, the county will train women and youth contractors on the basic skills, ensure that they have registered companies that can access government tenders, and liaise with banks to offer them credit facilities.

Mbarire describes herself as result oriented leader who never settles for mediocrity and therefore will set targets



to the officers in her government to make sure “we achieve our goals within set timelines.”

She believes her management skills and political networks will help her succeed. “My political networks will be of great value. I have been into politics for twenty years and I have created important and useful political networks. I have good friends across the political divide.”

But to succeed even more, Mbarire pledges to operate on an open door policy and incorporate the views of all in the county for her project to succeed. “Mine will be a people centred government. I promise to do better in terms of engaging the local leadership. As a governor, I will be the glue that brings this people together.

I will create a forum where we can meet regularly and discuss the issues affecting the county, know what each leader is doing, so that we are able to lobby as a team for other programs and projects at the national level.”

Her focus will be to ensure there is transparency and accountability so that the people of Embu enjoy prudent management of their resources. “I will be digitizing the entire revenue collection system to ensure that local revenue does not end up on people’s pocket.”

She is however afraid that development in the county has been a bit skewed in favour of certain areas but vows to use affirmative action approach for the areas that have been marginalized so that they can begin to feel being part of the government and its plans.

“I want to ensure that the Mbeere community for instance, has either a CEC or a chief officer in my government. This will give them a voice in the executive arm of government.”

Mbarire says she does not want to be elected for the sake of it, but to be remembered as the best performing governor who delivered on her promises, who managed the county well, and safeguarded the interests of the people and their resources.

To other women seeking elective seats, she advises: “Just be issue driven, sell your manifesto, and let the people know what you stand for. Once they know your agenda they will support you. Do not play politics the way men do, men are usually crude, rough and sometimes use physical violence in elections. If you are woman do not fall into the trap of playing it the men way. Cut your own niche and run a campaign that befits you as a woman.” ■



My track record will see me through, says Waiguru

BY FAITH MUIRURI

In 2017, she made history becoming one of the first three female governors under the new Constitution of Kenya. Again, she is faced with the herculean task of proving that the win was not a fluke, but a firm belief by the electorate that women leadership brings the much-needed change in their lives.

This is Ann Waiguru, who describes herself as a leader, a trendsetter and a hardworking public servant who has always left a great mark in service delivery, both in public and private sectors.

From holding several positions in the National Government to her current position as the Governor, Kirinyaga County, Waiguru says her ability to deliver and perform can be traced back to her times in the National Government where she spearheaded the implementation of robust and transformational development programs at all levels.

She cites the one-stop service delivery centres called Huduma Centres that she introduced during her tenure as the Cabinet Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Devolution.

“Through this initiative, I was able to win a total of 15 awards in Africa and globally, including the 2015 United Nations Public

Service Award.

Waiguru who will be defending her gubernatorial seat on a United Democratic Alliance (UDA) ticket is upbeat that she will reclaim the seat. She believes the projects she has initiated in Kirinyaga have transformed lives and will be the basis for her re-election.

“I have been able to deliver during my first term as a governor and therefore I will be campaigning on the strength of my vision which is premised on what I intend to do, what I have done, and how much more I intend to achieve.”

The Governor has steered several development projects in

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« **FROM PAGE 4** the county which she says gives her an edge over her opponents.

Key among them include the transformation of the health sector. Here, she implemented a number of initiatives which have paved way for massive infrastructural and service delivery reforms.

“Our legacy project is the Kerugoya Level Five Hospital. The ultra-modern five-storey medical complex will be a game changer in the level of medical services that the county will offer. It will be one of the best referral hospitals in the region and is equipped with an ICU, a HDU, an oncology center and a burns unit among other state-of-the-art amenities.”

She has also initiated plans to upgrade Kimbimbi and Kianyaga Hospitals from Level 3 to Level 4 facilities. “This is in addition to the completion of 20 dispensaries aimed at boosting the provision of primary healthcare at the grassroots.”

The investment in the health sector has witnessed an improvement in maternal healthcare through construction of maternity wards in Kimbimbi and South Ngariama Hospitals as well as additional wards in hospitals such as Baricho.

Waiguru also prides herself for introducing an economic stimulus program within the county, locally known as ‘Wezesha’ which is swahili word meaning ‘empower’.

Through this program, the county has supported 75,000 households to undertake various agricultural activities that enable them to earn an extra Ksh. 1,000 per day.

Over the past five years, the county government has witnessed the construction of 15 modern markets in various towns across the county. These include Makutano, Wang’uru, Kagio Fresh Produce Market, Kagio Clothes Market, Kutus, Kerugoya, Kagumo, Kianyaga, Kiamutugu, Kibingoti, Sagana, Githure, Gathoge, Makutano Tomato Market and Karumandi.

On roads, the Governor is credited with grading and gravelling of about 5,000 kilometres of roads as well as construction of vital bridges across major rivers such as Nyamindi.

Waiguru hopes the electorate will assess her on the work she has done and give her another chance to lead them.

And if they reelect her, she says she plans to fully automate services at the hospitals. “We plan to put up systems that will streamline service delivery and enhance transparency and accountability in collection of revenue.

In other jurisdictions, Hospital Information Management System have helped to reduce expenses, errors and failures and enhance accuracy and better inventory control.

“It will also enhance speed in obtaining information and create a more secure data storage system. This will pave way for rationalization of staff so that the county is able to focus on other more important functions,” Says Waiguru.

Despite her agenda, the governor has to contend with a myriad of challenges.

Waiguru says that women leadership is still greatly hampered by many obstacles including blatant and subtle attitudes and

beliefs that women cannot penetrate leadership domains traditionally assigned to men.

“In my political life, I have had to deal with the ills of negative publicity fueled by political opponents who believe I am rising faster than a woman should.

To make matters worse, she laments, the arguments against women often focus on trivial issues such as their physical looks and their marital status rather than on ideas and leadership capabilities.

Waiguru says all these challenges inspire her and increases her resilience, commitment to excellence, and ability to deliver complex tasks. “I can now say that the experience has elevated me to the level that I am in today.”

She advises women seeking elective posts to stay focused, sell their agenda and demonstrate their ability to lead and deliver.

“They must believe they have what it takes to bring tangible change in areas that affect them since they understand better the unique interests of women and girls. We must find a common ground that will help us bring new dignity and respect to women and girls.”

Waiguru advises emerging women leaders to align themselves with seasoned women leaders for mentorship.

Despite the many obstacles women face in their struggle to get into leadership spaces, she is confident that they will eventually gain their space and major recognition even in positions that have traditionally been a preserve of men. ■



“In my political life, I have had to deal with the ills of negative publicity fueled by political opponents who believe I am rising faster than a woman should.

I am the change you want; says young woman seeking to be Kajiado North MP

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

At just 22 years of age, Anita Soina is a woman on a huge mission. She wants to be the next Member of Parliament for Kajiado North.

Young, articulate, and a renowned environmentalist, Soina believes that when women lead, rivers run upstream. Her interest in active politics started at a very young age. In 2017, Soina was already a household name in official campaigns for **PAGE 7»**



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youthful politicians including Ababu Namwamba.

This time around, she is using the same skills to win a political office through the Green Thinking Action Party (GTAP), which she says aligns with her social change agenda that leans heavily on environmental protection and conversation.

Four years ago, Soina founded SpiceWarriors, an organization that promotes environmental conservation, rallying other young people to protect the universe. A job she has done well.

So why is she running for a political office? Soina says politics play a central role in environmental governance, social and economic development. But to address the environmental and social injustices, accelerate interventions around the protection of the environment and deliver a healthy and safe environment for the people of Kajiado North, she has to be at the decision making table.

“Women and children are the most affected by badly crafted policies, yet they are not at the decision making table and in corridors of power to address these gaps. Women are mothers and sisters and having suffered many challenges, they understand the solutions to problems facing communities today,” she observes.

Women missing on the decision making table is one of the issues she addresses in her book, *The Green War*. The book highlights her ongoing journey, challenges and future plans to stop environmental degradation. She believes the most pressing problems facing communities today are directly linked to the environment.

“Take for instance water shortages and sanitation related challenges in many households today. It is all linked to climate change. Climate action is in urgent need of immediate attention. When we talk about climate change we are also talking about food security.”

Hence addressing environmental challenges is high on her agenda as a key deliverable to the people of

Kajiado. To her, the socio-economic problems facing her people are strongly correlated with environment. Her agenda therefore is anchored on environmental conservation, which is viable, practical, cost-effective and importantly, sustainable.

Apart from environment, she

“Women and children are the most affected by badly crafted policies, yet they are not at the decision making table and in corridors of power to address these gaps. Women are mothers and sisters and having suffered many challenges, they understand the solutions to problems facing communities today,”

also wants to address health and insecurity issues. “Most of Kajiado North is cosmopolitan as the area includes Ngong, Rongai and Kiserian. I want to address insecurity which is closely linked to unemployment, education and even though health is a devolved function, every leader can do something to make health services more accessible.”

“We have quite a number of hospitals that are not functional. We only have a few public schools and overcrowding makes learning difficult.”

A graduate of Multi-Media University of Kenya with a degree in Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations and Corporate Communication, Soina says she is the best for the job of transforming Kajiado North into fast developing county.

But she acknowledges that the task ahead is not an easy one for women, young people and more so young female politicians. The leadership space, she says, is very hostile to women and young people aspiring to be leaders.

Fondly known as ‘green MP’ among her supporters, Soina is well-known

for fighting environmental wars. “This journey is not about me. I started working as a community volunteer even before I turned 18 years old. My conservation efforts have provided me with a strong network of people and a solid platform on which to launch my political bid.”

She is not participating in politics for the sake of it. “I am deeply invested in my political career. I am a youthful politician and I do not want my political career to be dead on arrival. Unlike a veteran politician, I have too much to lose.”

“Many of our leaders and politicians that we look up to are aging and young leaders are strapping their boots on to be the Martha Karua of tomorrow. When their time to exit the political stage comes, there will be no leadership gap because I and other young leaders are up to the task.”

The other good news is that the political leadership is slowly changing for women with many of them seeking leadership positions. But to level the political field, Soina stresses on the importance of addressing “the toxic nature of our politics.

“Our safety and security is also a concern because we are easily threatened through social media and text messages. This is being used to intimidate us.”

Another major challenge is lack of resources to enable her move around the county and campaign. So is culture and attitudes of and about young people that Soina says is not working for young leaders.

“Youth voices are not easily heard. Youths call for youthful leadership but are the first ones to get tokenized. It is very difficult to enjoy youth support because they also want to eat from you and you cannot feed them the same way a veteran leader can. It is the older people that enjoy youth support.”

Despite these challenges, Soina is very optimistic. “I have a thick skin and I am focused on the goal, nothing comes easy and no one said it was easy. If women keep pushing, we will get there.” ■



Kibe upbeat about reclaiming her seat despite court battles

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Wanjiku Kibe rose to political fame when she garnered landslide victory to become the first woman to be elected in Gatundu North constituency in the 2017 General Elections.

Her joy was however short lived when the high court nullified her victory. This followed a petition by her opponent challenging her election. She

challenged the ruling in the Supreme Court, which upheld her election.

But before the dust could settle, she was slapped with another petition seeking to nullify her election. The reason: the petitioner argued that she was not qualified to vie for the parliamentary seat since, on the date of her election in the 2017 General Election, she had not resigned as a nominated MCA from the Kiambu

County Assembly.

According to Kibe, this set her on the path of unending court battles which were only resolved around February, 2022.

“These were the most depressing moments of my political career and I had to fight hard to retain the seat and remain on track to deliver on my promises.”

And as we approach the August polls, the former radio presenter at Kameme FM is upbeat that she will reclaim the seat. She is vying against more than five competitors, all men, who are eying the seat.

“My opponents moved to court because they did not believe in a woman leader, but now they can attest to the transformation in the Constituency.”

Among her key **PAGE 9»**

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achievements over the past five years as an MP is being able to revamp the education sector by improving infrastructure in all the 64 primary schools in the Constituency. Most of the dilapidated classrooms have either been renovated or new classrooms built to ensure effective teaching and learning.

"I have also ensured that all needy children receive bursary from the CDF bursary kitty."

In relation to infrastructure, Kibe has also pushed for the rehabilitation and reclassification of the Thika-Gakoe-Magumu-Flyover from class D under the County Government to a National Government road. She was able to lobby the national government to tarmac roads of over 150 kilometres.

"I have also established two innovation centres in preparation for operationalization of our ICT, innovation hub and Creative Art centres in line with the Ministry of ICT policy.

She says these hubs will serve as creative arts nurturing centres that will greatly benefit the youth in this digital era through what is known as Ajira programmes.

Other successes are in the areas of electrification and education. "We have installed street lights in a bid to improve security and to spur 24 hour economy in the constituency. We have also managed to light over 25 major Centers in partnership with Kenya Power and lighting company.

If reelected, her priorities include setting up an endowment fund to ensure all needy students are fully supported throughout their education. She says that CDF bursary kitty is only able to cover 35 percent of beneficiaries which limits the number of students that can benefit.

The other is youth empowerment initiatives. "We have been able to put up two innovation centres in the constituency which are yet to be operationalized. If elected, I will ensure these centres become functional and

construct additional centres in every ward."

But a long term intervention on matters of joblessness is to "create a database of our skill sets and then link young people with the private sector to help address the issue of unemployment."

"I have not been mentioned in any corruption allegations. I am basing my campaigns on my performance. That has made my campaigns easier. I am optimistic of going back to parliament as Gatundu North MP for a second term,"

also focus on establishing a Technical training institute in the constituency to ensure majority of the youth are equipped with skills requisite in the market."

Kibe holds a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Education from Kenyatta University and Master in Business Administration degree from the University of Nairobi. She also sits in the Energy; and Communication, Information and Innovation committees in parliament.

As she exudes confidence of retaining her seat, she is worried about the smear campaigns and character assassination by her opponents against her candidature.

"Malicious falsehoods and smear campaign won't work. It was used against me in 2017 but I was elected. My Constituents want services, they want a person they can easily identify with, a leader with a development record and one who understands them.

She is glad that none of her opponents has any tangible evidence against her on none performance, misuse of Constituency Development Fund, allocation of bursary funds and

other public funds.

"I have not been mentioned in any corruption allegations. I am basing my campaigns on my performance. That has made my campaigns easier. I am optimistic of going back to parliament as Gatundu North MP for a second term," says a confident Kibe.

In addition, she believes the gender card will work for her. "I have always presented myself as a mother who is regarded highly in the community. My rallying call in this campaign is Njorua ya wira (meaning a champion at work) which resonates very well with the electorate.

One thing she has done to endear herself to the electorate it to be accessible. "Despite the bruising court battles, I have always managed to find enough time to be with my voters."

She says that it is through these interactions with the electorate that she has learnt a lot on challenges facing them, while accepting and encouraging positive criticisms on her performance.

"This interaction has also given me the opportunity to serve my people better having first-hand information on issues affecting them. My happiest moments are when I receive feedback from the community on ongoing projects or sharing ideas and discussing issues affecting them."

On two thirds, she points out that as a country we are progressing very well in ensuring spaces for women especially in the political arena and cites the naming of Martha Karua by the Azimio Coalition Presidential contender as his running mate as remarkable. "This is a very historic moment in this country because we have never had a major presidential candidate picking a woman."

She urges women to come out in large numbers and contest for political seats, but cautions them against playing dirty politics. "You don't have to insult your competitors or use vulgar language so that you can be elected, you can still sell your manifesto, be decent and people will vote for you." ■

My track recorded will deliver votes for me, Martha Wangari



BY RUTH OMUKHANGO

Mention of the name Martha Wangari Wanjira, Member of Parliament for Gilgil Constituency, attracts smiles and excitement among the residents of Gilgil, a testimony that she is doing something good for them.

“She is humble and a person who delivers on her promises. You can feel her work in our lives,” says John Kariuki, a resident of Gilgil.

Popularly known as Mama na Kazi or simply a performer, Wangari has lived up to this slogan and delivered on her manifesto.

Her performance and unassuming character seem to endear her to the voters. They recently came out in large numbers to vote for her during very competitive party primaries, which she won. She is now running on United Democratic Alliance party ticket.

Her win was

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informed by her down to earth approach to people and the many development projects she has initiated in the constituency for the past five years. “I am approachable and easily relate with my people,” says Wangari, “I am of high integrity, good in communication and an excellent team player.”

A graduate of Statistics at the University of Nairobi, Wangari says one of her successes is being able to create time to listen, understand and offer support to the issues that affect her constituents, irrespective of their political affiliations.

One of her successes is around helping the people of Gilgil to access water. During her tenure, she has managed to lobby several organizations and the government to drill 11 boreholes. This has ensured sustainable water flow.

In addition to water, she has done a lot of work around improvement of infrastructure both in schools and other areas that require good connectivity network.

In this regard, she spearheaded, in collaboration with the National Government Constituency Development Fund and other partners, improvement of infrastructure in local Schools and National Government Administration offices. Other improvements realized targeted roads, and Gilgil town Drainage system.

“There is a lot of works that is in progress. I have clearly set the pace and the development path for the Constituency. The

foundation I have put in place will be affected if we fail to continue with this journey.”

Wangari says she is the one best suited to complete the many programs she has initiated in the Constituency if her people are to enjoy the full benefit of these projects.

Another issue that has endeared her to voters is initiating development in areas that voted for her competitors in the 2017 elections.

“There is a lot of works that is in progress. I have clearly set the pace and the development path for the Constituency. The foundation I have put in place will be affected if we fail to continue with this journey.”

“I have seen some leaders zoning areas that voted for them and those that did not vote for them. This does not apply in my constituency. I have several cases of people who openly malign me, but I still help them whenever a need arises.”

Besides being approachable, Wangari is known not to engage in abrasive brand of politics. She says she does only issue-based politics and not politics of gossip, maligning and name calling of other leaders.

Still, her journey is not free

of challenges. One of them is intimidation by her male opponents who use all manner of tactics to instill fear in her. It has not worked.

She also has to content with balancing politics and her family. “I have to balance my responsibilities between my work and family and this will get tough as the campaigns intensify.”

Like other women politicians, another major challenge is inadequate resources need to run her campaigns, especially during the final lap before the voting day.

Wangari says the challenge of campaign financing, violence, and patriarchy, are the leading causes of why women either fail to win or stop participating in competitive politics altogether.

One of the most useful lessons she has learnt on her political journey is that: every woman needs to have a support system as a backup and to always consult because no one has monopoly of knowledge.

“I have also learnt to communicate through mainstream media or social media as an important tool to contact my people. In many cases, social media is cheaper and efficient when used effectively.”

And as she readies herself for the intense campaign period, she notes: “Always put God first and He will fight your battles.” ■

Why I want to be Senator for Embu County, Frida Karani



BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Frida Karani wants to breathe fresh air into the leadership of Embu County and use the Senate as a platform to transform the lives of the Kenyan people.

Karani believes this time around women like her will emerge winners as her County and the country is ripe for women leadership. “My name is on the ballot for the Embu County Senate seat because it is a new dawn for Kenyan women.”

She is vying on The Service Party with one key agenda: To improve the living standards of her people. “Having worked extensively in development organizations and academia, I am no stranger to the

challenges facing people in Embu. I seek to bridge existing leadership gap with knowledge, interest, passion, experience and willingness.”

Karani’s journey in community service and overseeing community projects began in 2006 when she graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology.

“I have undertaken various water and sanitation projects in Mbeere South as part of response to Arid and Semi-Arid (ASAL) areas. These are child centered interventions to improve the living standards of school going children to boost school attendance and performance.”

Karani is further credited with introducing the concept of microfinance institutions or finance lending for Faulu

Kenya in Embu County as well as economic empowerment of women through winning strategies such as the table banking.

“I co-founded an organization known as the Transformative Women in Leadership Network, which aims at modeling leadership in women from a very early age.”

“I am also the founder of Stitch in Time My Africa Project (SITMAP) that was established to save certain situations in the society, primarily within the area of climate change. We promote climate action and climate smart practices by focusing on agriculture, and assisting the elderly with climate smart.”

For instance, climate smart housing entails using building material such as clay tiles that promote climate smart actions and positive health outcomes among the elderly.

Karani takes pride in the Rock Water Harvesting project, in which her and others are using rocks as water catchment areas to improve access to water within Embu County. She also on the forefront encouraging women to practice what is known as food forests that entails planting trees such as mangoes, macadamia and avocado for food and commercial purposes.

“I am involved in working with youths towards peace and security through public dialogues. I am also the patron of Athletics Kenya Embu. We promote alternative sports, beyond football, for health interests, hobby or pay.”

A respected climate champion, Karani has worked closely with Kenya Climate Change Working Group to help communities mitigate effects of climate change.

“Climate change is a global and national concern. It is important that we move from science and research to action. We are piloting research based activities at the grassroots level.

When a researcher recommends a certain tree species, we fundraise and provide farmers with the recommended variety. We are increasing knowledge at the community level and promoting sustainable climate action by enabling community’s to own their

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« FROM PAGE 12 solutions.”

Karani believes her knowledge gained in her PhD degree program at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Strategic Leadership will be useful in addressing climate change challenges as well as empowering her county government and community with know-how.

“NGOs and religious organizations must think like a business, guided by competitive strategies for them to be sustainable and impactful. This is based on my extensive experience in development organizations and initiatives that were internationally funded by donors such as Action Aid and Christian Aid and implemented at the grass root level.”

Apart from climate matters, Karani believes in mentoring young people, a service she has done to form four students on career choice and career excellence for over 15 years.

These are progressive thoughts and actions that she is bringing into the political and decision making spaces.

The only challenge is getting into these spaces as Karani is slowly learning. She says she has learnt that in politics “you are on your own. Run your race clear in the knowledge of why you are vying for any particular position.”

Like other women, she has to also content with the huge financial outlay needed to mount a county-wide campaign. She says expectations of handouts remains a major challenge that she counters when promoting her development agenda and candidature.

“Nevertheless, I am equal to the task. I will advocate for the rights of people to be granted, unconditionally, what is rightly theirs.”

Karani is currently among 50 women leaders competitively shortlisted from more than 700 applicants to participate in the second season of Ms. President Leadership Academy. The Academy seeks to improve participation of women in leadership by changing perceptions around women and leadership. ■

MARY WAMAUA NJOROGÉ



Another term for Mary Wamaua the incumbent MP Maragua

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Mary Wamaua Waithera Njoroge says she has delivered as promised and is issuing a new set of promises, to be delivered in her second term. Defending her seat on the UDA political party, she says Maragua people will decide based on her deliverables.

“When I asked for the Maragua seat in 2017, I made certain promises. I have delivered on a majority of these

promises. More than a half of the project I started are completed and others are ongoing without a hitch. There is still a lot more to be accomplished because I have not tackled or improved on all the areas,” she expounds.

“For instance, electricity connectivity, I found it at 35 to 40 percent, today we are at 65 percent. There are still areas that are dark. Through lobbying, I have opened up many feeder roads and pushed for the tarmacking of at least 10 roads but there are

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« FROM PAGE 13 a lot more to be done.”

Wamaua has awakened infrastructural development in the education sector having built two new secondary schools and three primary schools from the ground up; Senior Gichohi Secondary school, St. Paul Gituamba Secondary school, Kamakuri primary school, Gathuguri primary school and Gathaiti primary school.

Still, schools are undergoing wear and tear day after day and renovation is a continuous process, and that there are two areas that need a primary and a secondary school. These are areas where students are going more than five kilometers before they access a primary or a day secondary school.

“We are guided by the distance and population, for instance, St. Paul Gituamba secondary school was really a great need in the area because there were four feeder primary schools that did not have a primary school,” she observes.

As the first woman to hold the MP position in Maragua, Wamaua says there were men before her who said they would deliver but did not: “because I delivered, it is on this basis that I have the community’s blessings and stamp of approval to ask for a second term. I am still the person to watch.”

A teacher by profession, a Unionist and a representative of female teachers in Murang’a South Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) branch.

Cognisant of her journey ahead, Wamaua left her teaching profession and undertook a diploma course in road and buildings construction because her degree in teaching could not support her interests in the Civil industry.

“Having experience spanning 16 years in teachers politics gave me a lot of strength to vie for the Murang’a Women Representative seat in 2013, where I came second to Hon. Sabina Chege. Later on I agreed to be nominated to the Murang’a

County Assembly after failing to get a nomination in the national assembly,” she recounts.

“It is a journey that has provided me with great opportunities for bench making and experience, using every opportunity to introduce myself to the people.”

She says her leadership has made a notable, visible impact including lobbying for support to deliver services that are under the County government such as water projects. Maragua is in the driest part of the County bordering Machakos County, there are many completed boreholes courtesy of the CDF and the Ministry of Water.

“I have lobbied for some projects to connect my people with clean drinking water and for irrigation, there is the 900 million worth Maragua Bounty Water Project and we are at 65 percent in as far as the installation of this project is concerned. There is also the ILEGI Water Project for drinking and irrigation, it is worth 250 million courtesy of the national government, Ministry of Water and it is nearly 90 percent complete,” she indicates.

“I have successfully lobbied with the national government through the Ministry of Water and there are substantive water projects that I have done in the community. There are feeder roads that are supposed to be undertaken by the County government and I have completed at least 100 feeder roads through funding from KERA,”

On delivery and disbursements of bursaries, Wamaua, as she is fondly known, has systematized transparency and prioritization of beneficiaries based on vulnerability levels. Only the most vulnerable children benefit.

Further, she founded the Maragua Education Endowment Fund which provides full scholarships to very bright students who score at least 350 marks in their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). The program works alongside the bursary which goes to support very needy

students who score below 350 marks.

Hand in hand with the people of Maragua, the sitting MP has sustained socio-economic development among women and youths, as they often the most marginalized and vulnerable in the society.

“I have lifted up the percentage of rural electrification by successfully lobbying for more projects by virtue of being a member of the Energy Committee,

“I live in the rural area within the constituency and I am within reach for my constituency. I am accessible, I understand the dynamics in the area both the highs and lows. The people come to me often and we discuss the issues facing and I resolve those that I can and forward others to relevant officers and more so on matters security,” she observes.

Compared to 2017, she says 2022 is an easier race, “whenever you are vying for the first time the fear of the unknown can be consuming. People say if there were men before and they did deliver, how can you deliver and you are a woman. You know they look at us like what a man can do a woman cannot do but they took a risk because my neighbor in Kandara, Hon. Alice Wahome was delivering.”

The people also feared that as a woman, she would become proud and disappear to Nairobi, that if elected men have disappeared in Nairobi, what about women who are known to prefer the city life? The issue of me being a woman is no longer a concern, they are judging me based on my track record,” she emphasizes.

There are many challenges hindering women and “they can be more than what one person can bear. Competing against men is a rough, tough affair of insults, threats and even violence. Money is also an issue, stereotypes that women should be at home or lead in the church.”

“But I encourage women to stand strong and never to promise what they cannot deliver. Do what you said you will do and do not let it go before you deliver.” ■



Karuga heartbeat away from becoming the next MP for Nakuru Town East

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Grace Koi Karuga is one of those women who are not frightened with political competition, even when she is the only woman competing against eight men, some of them political heavy weights, now vying for the Nakuru Town East parliamentary seat.

Karuga, who is running on a KANU ticket, says is equal to the task and she leaves it to the voters

to decide.

Her supporters call her mama due to her compassionate approach to politics and commitment to transforming lives, especially among the elderly, vulnerable women and children, the sick and the marginalized.

"I am an advocate for child rights and maternal health. Before I resigned to contest, I was the Vice Chair of the Bondeni Maternity Board. I am also vocal on issues of gender-based violence."

Karuga says Nakuru Town East residents are aware of her track record. "I have stood with them, despite resource constraints. I have partnered with the County government, my party and the Red Cross to deliver relief to my people."

This is not Karuga's first attempt at competitive politics, having unsuccessfully vied for the Nakuru County Women Representative seat in 2017 on a KANU ticket. Although she lost, Karuga, a well-known

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« **FROM PAGE 15** business woman in Nakuru County, says it was not in vain.

“There is a very big difference between vying for a women representative seat and vying for a non-affirmative seat. Vying against other women is not the same as vying against men. It is very tough for women because we lack the finances needed to sustain a robust campaign.”

Opinion polls conducted recently show despite the race being male dominated, she is among the top three tipped to win. She says it is a sign that the political landscape is changing, that there is a shift in favor of women participation in political leadership and that ideology is winning over toxic politics.

Fearing of her high chances of winning, her male counterparts are using all manner of propaganda including telling the voters that she only fit to vie for the women representative position.

Another major challenge she and other women are facing is insecurity. Karuga says there are areas that are currently a no-go zone for women candidates especially the Flamingo area and Kivumbini where criminal gangs such as The Confirm gang reign.

“Even when you go to media station at night, you have to be very careful about your movements because at that time, your enemies know where you are and can easily locate you.”

She is hopeful that the directive by Interior Cabinet Secretary Fred Matiang’i that the National Government Administration Officials protect female candidates in the run up to the general elections will be enforced.

The directive was issued in

2021 following alarm from the civil society and human rights groups of how sexual and gender based violence are being used to hold-back women from participating in the political processes.

“There is a very big difference between vying for a women representative seat and vying for a non-affirmative seat. Vying against other women is not the same as vying against men. It is very tough for women because we lack the finances needed to sustain a robust campaign.”

Finances are another challenge. She says campaigns are very expensive. To navigate this, she has learnt to go where the people are such as at boda boda stands, markets and churches because it is less costly.

But it is not all gloom. Karuga notes that there is very positive mood in the political parties and in the communities about women leadership. For instance, women receiving nomination tickets to vie for high level positions on very strong parties is a case in point.

“The Governor of Nakuru has chosen a woman for a running mate and voters are warming up to women leadership. I am finding the political ground very favorable despite the many challenges we face. I am freely accessing areas such as Sokoni without a problem,

which previously needed you to go through political brokers to penetrate those areas.”

The media too is listening and willing to support women candidates than was the case in the past.

“This time round, I have forged a good relationship with the media because they can amplify my voice and my messages, and reach more people than I can.”

By accessing the media, Karuga has also learnt the importance of branding. “Branding is extremely expensive. Every time you see a campaign poster destroyed, that is money gone down the drain. That is a constant challenge for us and for me. My posters are being destroyed on a very frequent basis. I take this in my stride and as a sign that somebody somewhere is envious of my popularity,” she observes.

In addition to branding to market herself, Karuga is networking and engaging other women candidates, and incumbents, to help propel her campaigns.

“I have reached out to other women leaders and I am getting first hand mentorship, guidance and encouragement from those who have walked the path before me and reached their goal. My entire family supports me including my children who campaign side by side with me.”

An alumna of Mount Kenya University where she studied County Governance and Leadership, Karuga is glad that with a woman senator, a woman running mate for the Governor seat, and three women MPs, voters are slowly shifting to women leadership. This gives her a lot of comfort and hope.■

Mama Mbegu goes for the Mbeere South Parliamentary seat



BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Many years of helping farmers and communities improve their food productivity is turning into a blessing for Jane Wanjiru Mbutia, who is vying for the Member of Parliament, Mbeere South Constituency in Embu County.

While no woman in the sub-county has ever held an elective position, Mbutia who using the Democratic Party of Kenya ticket to get into this leadership position says the community wants a change maker, and they are seeing that in her.

Known as Mama Mbegu in the sub-county due to her certified seed

program, Mbutia is celebrated as one of the people who are working hard to deliver Mbeere South from the clutches of relief food.

"The certified seed program supports women farmers to put food on the table and money in their pocket by reducing reliance on recycled seeds that are often characterized by low productivity," says Mbutia.

"Women farm on huge tracks of land and I usually provide certified seeds enough to support about a quarter of an acre per beneficiary. I also provide avocado seeds."

She is now working with an estimated 75,000 households in Mbeere South

to plant three avocado trees per household. After three years, one tree has the potential to produce fruits worth Ksh30, 000.

The other gap she is addressing is the capacity deficit of women especially in the area of financial management and changing their mind-set that even with small investments, they can turnaround their lives.

"I sensitize women to use what they have to get what they want. You can start a business using only one cow or even your small kitchen garden. Economically empowered women can make transformative decisions for their families."

Access to water for farming, animals and drinking is another major problem. This is despite her sub-county being served by two major water bodies, Thiba River on one side and Tana River on the other.

"Mbeere South is home to seven major dams that supply electricity to the entire country and yet we have a serious water shortage. I was born and raised in Mbeere South and I have never seen piped water, not even a broken one," says Mbutia.

Over the years and through partnerships, Mbutia has supported drilling of boreholes and trained community members on how to manage them. But this is neither enough nor sustainable to support farming irrigation activities for subsistence and commercial purposes.

"Equally worse, we are the only constituency that does not have tarmacked roads. Accessibility is zero as we do not have even a kilometer of tarmac. One road was earmarked, Wamumu-Machang'a which is 42 kilometers long running between Makutano and Gachoka. The road was budgeted for 10 years ago and is yet to be finalized."

She laments that for 15 years, she has had to maintain a 20 kilometer road that serves six villages due to poor leadership.

On education matters, Mbutia runs the Mbeere South Child Can mentorship program geared at improving the number of girls in her

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county transiting
to University and
other colleges.

She boasts of a rich experience that she believes will benefit the sub-county if she is elected. A trained journalist from the University of Nairobi, Mbuthia has worked for Tea Board of Kenya, where she is credited for developing the Mark of Origin concept.

She also worked with the New KCC dream team as a corporate affairs manager. It is this team that revived a company that was on the verge of collapse. She later joined Murang'a County as the Communication Consultant and Advisor to the governor.

"We transformed Murang'a County. Before Mwangi wa Iria's tenure began, farmers were pouring milk on the road. Milk was sold at a throw away price but through an ambitious dairy program, dairy farming has never been the same again," she says.

She now wants to use this knowledge and experience to improve things in Mbeere South. What is proving challenging for her is the patriarchal system and negative portrayal of women that is denying them access to political power.

Lack of financial and human resources that are needed to help run a successful campaign and verbal abuses are the other challenges.

"Entering politics was a culture shock. The corporate world is a battle of ideology but in politics, it gets very personal. You are unmarried, bad mother, bad wife, aggressive, or loud. These are some of the labels attached to women to put them down."

Mbuthia says the character assassination and attacks that emotionally, physically and mentally drain women are making some of them think of steeping out of politics.

Still, she believes, women should never give up. For her, if it is not now, then when? She advises women to always have a main plan and a back-up plan to ensure that they are not always the casualties of politics, especially the so called negotiated democracy. ■

FAITH BUKACHI

I have done it, I can enhance it, says Bukachi



BY FAITH MUIRURI

After many years engaging in social work, Ruth Bukachi has decided to advance to the decision-making table where she believes she will address the social and economic challenges facing her people.

Her desire to serve the community started way back in 2009 when

she established Compassionate Hearts Charitable organization to uplift and empower the elderly and the disadvantaged groups in the community. Currently the organization has a membership of over 70,000 elderly persons spread across the country.

Through the Compassionate Hearts, Bukachi has been able to educate needy

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« **FROM PAGE 18** students and offer credit facilities to the elderly, both men and women who are able to refund the money at low interest rates.

She says the initiative has given the elderly people and especially the women a new lease of life and helped them pick up the pieces after being abandoned by the families.

“Majority have tents and chairs for hire during events in the community. Others are rearing chicken. This has become their sources of livelihood and they do not have to depend on people for their wellbeing.”

With support from her husband, she has built them houses, organized regular medical camps in the community and sponsored needy students from the county that are now pursuing studies in several national schools and universities.

Her entry into politics is already causing jitters among her competitors with the electorate, inspired by her philanthropic work, keen to give her a chance to lead.

The contest for the Woman Rep position in Vihiga County has attracted eleven contenders but Bukachi who will be vying as an independent candidate is confident that she will clinch the seat.

Just like in many other areas, she says that the county is ready for change of guard. “The County is craving for a new crop of leaders that will ensure that policies developed at the national level fully addresses the development needs of the Vihiga people.” Majority of the people in the county do not have any form of income and cannot afford basic healthcare.

She says the situation has been compounded by illicit brews where people within the productive age wasting away in the community.

A holder of a Bachelor’s Degree in Peace and Conflict, Bukachi uses her knowledge to touch lives.

“In Vihiga County, conflict is caused by inadequate food, and lack of jobs. This has led to conflict in the home because most men are not able to provide for their families and have thus turned to illicit brews. I have begun a rehabilitation programme that targets both the

“I will be banking on my track record and support from the women, youth and the elderly people who have benefitted from the several initiatives I have implemented in the community.”

drunkards and the brewers.”

She has been able to support women who sell the illicit brews to start other income generating activities. “Most of these women are widows who have been condemned by society. Behind them is a lot of pain and desperation that has pushed them to selling illicit liquor. Majority have suffered during police raids who demand bribes even when they have not sold anything.”

“What I did is to put the ladies together and support them to start income generating projects. They started cooking mandazis and chapatis and they can now attest to the fact that they are earning more than what they were earning from illicit brews.”

Having shown that it is possible, Bukachi says if elected, she will transform the county and ensure marginalized groups have a voice in the community.

Her leadership is primarily hinged on empowering women and other marginalized groups in the county especially the elderly.

Renowned for her philanthropic work in the community, Bukachi is upbeat that her invaluable contribution will give her an upper edge during the elections.

She says that her experience in dealing with the marginalized groups at the County level makes her best suited for the job. To her, she is best placed to articulate the aspirations of women and other marginalized groups in Vihiga County and is willing to use her expertise in community work to restore the county’s position as one of the country’s most economically viable regions.

“I will be banking on my track record and support from the women, youth and the elderly people who have benefitted from the several initiatives I have implemented in the community.”

Her biggest inspiration comes from the elderly people and marginalized groups who continue to show her tremendous support.

“My father-in-law who is 97-year-old has been encouraging me to seek an elective seat. He knows I will be able to push for an amendment in the NHIF Act to allow anyone who has contributed to NHIF be covered free of charge at old age.”

To women aspiring for political seats, Bukachi says that “politics is not for the fainthearted and women aspiring for political seats should brace themselves for mudslinging, voter buying and back stabbing.”

For her, she is not going to engage in any of this but bank on her track record of transforming lives. Her rallying call during the elections is that “I have done it, I can enhance it. I have seen it work through the Compassionate Hearts and intend to scale up the same initiative if elected.” ■

