

SautiSasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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Keeping the eye on the prize

UN
WOMEN



Long walk to gender equality for Kenyan women



Women urged to continue making inroads into Kenya's decision making processes. PHOTO COURTESY

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Kenya's political landscape remains predominantly male. This is despite the existing legal and institutional reforms that seek to enhance the environment for participation of women in the political discourse and governance in country.

According to the Registrar of Political Parties Ann Nderitu, the number of women participating in the electoral process falls short of the aspirations envisaged in the Constitution.

She says that while the Constitution of Kenya has laid a strong foundation for the principles of gender equity and equality in the country's political

and governance structures, this remains a mirage to the women,

"For instance, out of the total of over 16,000 gazetted aspirants by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), female candidates were less than 2,000, representing a paltry 12.8%."

According to the Registrar of Political Parties, the analysis serves to affirm that 90 percent of people vying for elections in this country are still men.

"The number of women who vied for elective seats during the last elections is negligible."

She says official reports indicate that there were no women candidates in 138 constituencies.

"The absence of women candidates in these constituencies meant a clean win for men in these constituencies."

Nderitu spoke even as it emerged that counties such as Garisa, Mandera, Marsabit, Kajiado and Nyamira did not elect a woman in any other seat apart from the women representative seat.

A further analysis by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) reveals that out of the over 22 million voters, about 49.12 per cent were female voters.

Yet, KIPPRA notes that women still form the minority, comprising

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<<FROM PAGE 2 24.8% of the elected leaders at the National level after the general elections held on 9th August 2022.

On whether more women took advantage of the independent route to participate in the election, the Registrar of Political Parties intimates that women accounted for only 7 percent of all the persons seeking elective seats as independent candidates.

Nderitu wants the women movement to take the lead in educating the public about women leadership. "This will help push for behavioral change and deal with perception issues that continue to impede participation of women in electoral processes."

"The women themselves also need to encourage each other to come out and vie for elective seats. The more we have more women vying for the different elective seats, the more they are likely to be elected to bridge the glaring gender gap in political leadership."

The registrar says fielding women candidates across all the electoral areas will help in advancing the two thirds constitutional threshold in political leadership.

"There must be a deliberate move to field candidates in each of the electoral areas without looking at the option of fielding here and not there."

She argues that advocacy and lobbying must be a continuous process. "Older women who have made it in politics must deliberately mentor upcoming ones for the struggle to

continue."

Nderitu also called for the tightening of some of the legal provisions. "We need to keep reviewing and seeing where the gaps are so that women that vie experience a smoother race."

"Men must also be made to understand that election is about representation and representation is about inclusion. If the population of women is 50 plus, then they should be accommodated by creating a conducive environment devoid of violence.

"This time round, cases of physical violence were minimal. However, women still had to deal online violence which causes them to abandon their political aspirations."

The United Nations stresses the need for countries to promote women's participation in democracy and be part of decision-making. Democracy acts as an incubator for gender equality and is interlinked and, therefore, it is important to breach the gap in the democratic participation of women in elections.

For true gender equity and equality to become a reality in Kenya, as elsewhere, decades will be required to alter entrenched attitudes and customs.

Nonetheless, much can be done in the short-term to meet the provisions of the Constitution and ensure that women are fairly represented in the political institutions. This may include having the Office of Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) formulating policies to ensure

that a proportion of public funds set aside for political parties are used to support women candidates in the electoral process.

At the moment, the Political Parties Act provides that 15 percent of the political parties fund is channeled towards promoting the agenda of women, youth, Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) and all other special interest groups.

Political parties that benefit from the kitty are expected to come up with programmes tailored at increasing political participation of women, youth, and PWDs among other marginalized groups at the grassroots level.

"Political parties are supposed to consider issues around special interest groups and their inclusion generally," says Nderitu

This, she notes, is monitored through a work plan that political parties submit with details of how the party intends to use the 15 percent. "At the end of every financial year, the auditor general comes to check whether the party followed its work plan and gives a clean bill of health."

However, with the legal caveat only a small proportion of special interest groups have been able to benefit from this funding.

According to the registrar of political parties, the formula for sharing funds should be revised to accommodate more political parties and bring on board a significant proportion of special interest groups.

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Election violence in Kenya. PICTURE COURTESY OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.

Societal expectations that bar women from Leadership

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

That women can be a positive force of change in the society is no longer in doubt. Kenyans elected seven women for the position of governor in the just concluded 2022 general elections.

But gender and governance experts such as Cyprian Nyamwamu say that there

is still a long way to go for women, and there is urgent need to re-evaluate barriers that make it hard for women to register greater gains in the political space.

Speaking to journalists during a training workshop held by the African Woman and Child Feature Service, he said that conflict, fears of conflict and tension remains some of the troubling barriers.

These sentiments are backed by research which shows that women shy away from running for various political seats for fear of being attacked, or harassed.

Studies indicate that as the bearer of multiple roles, female leaders are faced with the reality of frequent role adjustment and switching. They face the influence and

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<<FROM PAGE 4 constraints of many factors from the outside world. If they cannot properly handle these multiple role conflicts, it is easy to bring a series of adverse effects for women.

In the political arena that is characterized by opportunities and fierce competition, women are not always able to manage these roles and they face significant backlash.

“This form of conflict is a reality for many women in leadership today. It is important that the society exercises sensitivity around these issues to avoid prejudicing women. In Kenya today, the narrative is that once women join politics, their marriages crumble,” says Ann Njeri Njuguna, a former aspirant for a Member of County Assembly position in Kiambu County.

Njeri says that this narrative is the stick that has been used to beat down women over the years; with expectations too high when it comes to women.

“It is a challenging and uncertainty world which is full of opportunities and competition. The special group-female leaders have the same social mission as male leaders. However, due to kinds of differences in gender roles and social roles, female leaders have encountered some barriers that cannot be ignored in their further career development,” says the

Scientific Research.

“In the big arena of society,” the Scientific Research finds that “each person usually plays multiple roles at the same time. The interpretation of different roles is often inconsistent with the requirements of individuals, which is subject to the conflict of individual time allocation, the limited energy and the contradiction of goals.”

As such, Elias Omondi, a political analyst says that there is perceived conflict between what is expected of a woman, or a female and the character of a politician which affects women in the political arena.

“Firm and decisive women are called aggressive and high handed. These are not labels you will hear being thrown at men. Men are expected to be strong, firm and decisive and women are expected to be demure and to take a submissive position,” says Omondi.

These labels affect how women perform. “It is high time that the society keeps up with the changing time. Women have made excellent leaders and are more sensitive to issues such as multidimensional poverty. They are not only concerned with the bottom-line but all the nuances of what it means to be well as a human being and to thrive,” adds Omondi.

Njeri feels that the conflict between what the society expects of a woman and what the political arena expects holds women back from active leadership contests.

Experts argue that different expectations for different genders seem to set a behavioral circle for the men and women. During the growth process, men are more encouraged to go out and struggle, while women are told that the family should be the most important, while work is secondary.

“Look at the recent interviews for the Cabinet Secretary positions. Women candidates came under intense scrutiny and much more was expected from them. Social media was awash with less than positive remarks and assessments of how some of the women performed. It will take sustained civic education for the society to understand that times have changed and what a man can do, a woman can do,” notes Njeri.

Gender experts such as Njeri are happy that there is much to celebrate, especially in light of the seven female governors holding positions across the country. While this is a long way to the 50 percent mark, it is a journey of a thousand miles and that the first steps show that the future is bright for Kenyan women.

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Counting gains of the Amended Political Parties Act



Kenyas politics remain male dominated. PHOTO COURTESY

BY FAITH MUIRURI

The raft of changes introduced to the Political Parties Act ahead of the 2022 General Elections paved way for an improved electoral environment.

According to the Registrar of Political Parties Ann Nderitu, some of the changes introduced by the amendments served

to bolster the participation of women in the general elections held on 9th August 2022.

“Women were freer to participate both as independent candidates and as party candidates,” she notes.

Further, the amendment extended the period of registration of political parties and therefore many people, including

women, we were able to register additional political parties. Three of the parties are owned by women.

The Registrar also cites a variety of methods by which parties were allowed to conduct nominations. “This helped to reduce the cost of nominations which remains a major obstacle for women vying for political seats.”

PAGE>>7

<<FROM PAGE 6 Nderitu says the Amendment addressed the internal dispute resolution mechanism. "It helped to create a clear system within the party on how dispute resolution would be addressed which was better than in the previous elections."

"There are some disputes that were resolved within the party and women were given tickets. This was a clear departure from previous elections where there were no systems even to address these disputes properly within the party."

The Political party funding criteria was also reviewed in the amendment with 15 per cent of funding being tied to the ratio of special interest groups included on their nomination lists. "This provision served to encourage parties to bring more women onto their lists."

Under these amendments, political parties were permitted to directly nominate candidates through universal suffrage of their membership, or to indirectly nominate them through consensus, internal polls, delegates, or other methods.

Nderitu says that while indirect nominations in some instances worked against strong women candidates, the few that benefitted from direct party tickets managed to secure resounding victories during the elections.

"When parties chose indirect methods where consensus building was used, some of the

women felt disenfranchised and preferred the process should have been universal suffrage yet the same universal suffrage was what was causing them to shy away from elective politics."

A glance at the numbers of women elected in the just concluded General Elections reveals that most women who



"Women were freer to participate both as independent candidates and as party candidates,"

ANN NDERITU,)_REGISTRAR OF POLITICAL PARTIES



were issued with direct party tickets in respective party strongholds registered landslide victory during the polls.

Among those issued with direct tickets by the Orange Democratic Party included Gladys Wanga who won Governor's seat in Homabay County, Lilian Gogo (Rangwe), Millie Odhiambo (Suba North), Eve Obara (Kabondo Kasipul), Roza Abuyu (Kisumu West), Amina Mnyazi(Malindi) and Beatrice Elachi- Dagoreti North.

In Kenya Kwanza, women issued with direct tickets also registered resounding victory in their respective electoral areas. Fatuma Achani won

the Governor's seat in Kwale County, Susan Kihika, Nakuru County while Ann Waiguru reclaimed her gubernatorial seat in Kirinyaga County. Cecil Mbarire was subjected to the party nomination exercise. She clinched the party ticket and won the Embu Gubernatorial seat. Tabitha Karanja also won the Nakuru senatorial seat after being issued with a direct nomination.

At the single member constituency, scores of women issued with direct tickets by Kenya Kwanza coalition secured landslide victory in the just concluded polls. They include Alice Wahome (Kandara), Mary Wamaua (Maragua), Wanjiku Muhia (Kipipiri) Gathoni Wa Muchomba (Githunguri), Maryann Keitany (Aldai), Phylis Bartoo (Moiben), Jayne Kihara (Naivasha), Mary Emase (Teso South).

Wavinya Ndeti and Agnes Kavindu also benefitted from direct tickets by Wiper Party and clinched both the gubernatorial and senatorial seats respectively in Machakos County. Jessica Mbalu (Kibwezi East), Susan Kiamba (Makueni) and Edith Nyenze (Kitui West) also bagged the seats through the Wiper party ticket.

In Jubilee Agnes Pareiyo, Ruweida Mohamed (Lam East), Irene Njoki (Bahati) and Rachael Nyamai (Kitui South) garnered victory on the party ticket while in Kanu's Naisula Lesuuda retained her Samburu East parliamentary seat through the party ticket.

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Media stands up to be counted on promoting women leadership



Journalists preparing for a press conference at the Bomas of Kenya during the tallying of the 2022 Presidential Elections. PHOTO BY GEORGE NGESA

BY SAUTI SASA CORRESPONDENT

The media has been applauded for its remarkable improvement in the coverage of the just concluded 2022 General Elections, with most reports attribute the success to effective preparedness of the media and objective reporting.

Many women leaders have acknowledged receiving good media coverage that provided them with platforms to profile and market themselves to their constituents.

Unlike the previous elections where media had been blamed for lack of objectivity in the coverage of female candidates; and accused of

perpetuating gender stereotypes and biases in their reporting, this time around things were different. Many media houses allocated sufficient space to cover female politicians.

This strategic move by the media was informed by a number of interventions that were geared towards addressing glaring gaps that have existed in the media for several years. Most importantly, strengthening the capacity of media to report objectively and appreciate women leadership.

Collaborative efforts between media organisations, Civil Society Organisations with support from donor organisations cannot be underestimated in their efforts in

the implementation on these key interventions. African Woman and Child Feature Service (AWCFS), for instance, has for over four years, with the support of donors, invested heavily on building the capacity of journalists from print and electronic media. This has included sensitisation of senior editors from various media houses on gender responsive reporting and the value women bring to leadership.

Other key interventions by AWCFS included development of gender policies for media houses to incorporate gender in organisational structures and editorial practice.

According to Arthur Okwemba,

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<<FROM PAGE 8 Executive Director at African Woman and Child Feature Service, the gender policy has addressed key issues namely the promotion of gender balance and sensitivity in both content and structures of radio stations and ensuring institutional culture and practices are gender sensitive.

AWCFS through the support of UN Women has helped seven community radio stations across the country to develop gender policies. Some of these stations include; include Radio Kaya in coastal region, Radio Nam Lolwe covering Nyanza Region, Mbaitu FM which covers Eastern Region and Radio Yetu which covers Rift Valley region among others.

Okwemba adds that the support on the development of these policies was strategic since community and vernacular radio stations are a powerful tool in influencing attitudes, thoughts, practices and behaviour of people within communities.

Evidence shows that community radio stations that have developed and implemented their gender policies, contributed significantly to the increased visibility of women politicians in the media in the 2022 Elections.

Radio Nam Lolwe, a national radio station which broadcasts in dholuo language, for instance, affirms that the gender policy has helped it to raise awareness among staff on the need to cover political, social and economic issues from a fair and gender sensitive perspective.

According to Beatrice Wasonga, Programme Manager at Radio Nam Lolwe, the gender policy is an important entry point that influenced how gender issues are covered. This was manifested during the electioneering period when the station did a lot to promote women leadership.

“It is the implementation of our gender policy that necessitated the deliberate effort to reach out to women politicians at both national and county level to give them opportunities to showcase their contributions to the society and market themselves to voters,” says Wasonga.

“Unlike before where managers within the media houses did not consider gender sensitive reporting as important, we now insist that our reporters seek views of both genders in news, features articles and interactive programmes.”

According to Evans Odhiambo, Senior Reporter at Radio Nam Lolwe, issues of gender had previously been less emphasised. Women were given a raw deal but now there are many women elected as Governors, Senators and other elective and nominated seats.

He adds that Nyanza now has the first woman elected Governor in Homa Bay County. Positive media coverage contributed to her election.

The development of the gender policies was informed by recommendations from a study conducted by AWCFS on Women in Political News which revealed

the lack of comprehensive gender policies to guide editorial practice in many media houses.

The study found that only 26 per cent of those heard, read or seen in the media are women compared to 74 per cent men. Men appeared on television seven times more than women.

Another study conducted by Eastern Africa Journalists Association further found that few women across Eastern Africa hold a position of decision making. The reports further emphasise the role of media as an important agent of socialization, shaping of gender roles. Hence, its mechanisms for checks and balances with respect to gender need to be strengthened to enable projection of women in a decent and dignified way.

Okwemba notes that stations that have developed and implemented their gender policies have benefited greatly by attracting support offered by gender and women's rights organisations who are willing to support gender programmes of such stations.

For Radio Nam Lolwe, as a result of the Gender policy, they benefited immensely from international media houses such as Deutsche Welle to implement important sections of the gender policy such as monitoring and evaluation.

Wasonga says that the gender policy is a living document that will continue to advance gender equality and equity in the country.

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Women scale great heights in political leadership

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Kenya has registered remarkable gains in the participation of women in the politics and leadership positions. An analysis by the UN Women reveals that women now hold up to 10.6 percent of the elective seats. "This is up from 9.1 percent and 7.7 percent in 2017 and 2013 respectively," says Hellen Muchunu from the UN Women during a media roundtable meeting.

According, Muchunu, the country has recorded significant changes across all the six elective seats.

"The most commendable change is in the Governor's seat where the percentage of women increased from 6 percent in 2017 to 15 percent. The other interesting thing is the high retention rate at the national assembly."

Muchunu says that the retention strategy worked perfectly well with a total of 15 out of the 23 women MPs who served in the 12th parliament retaining their seats.

At the county level, she reveals that the number of women elected as Members of the County Assembly increased to 115.

Muchunu however says the increment was negligible



especially when you look at the total number of elective seats earmarked for grabs in the 1,450 wards. "As much as we have seen an increment, this is not a good number. A lot of work needs to be done at the county level to ensure more women are elected as MCAs (Members of County Assembly) as this seat has emerged as a good breeding ground for women aspiring for political seats."

"We have seen a notable trend of women who started off as nominated or elected MCAs in 2013 but have today ascended to

the various political seats.

According to the analysis by UN women, Nakuru County leads in the pack of counties with the highest number of women elected across the country starting from the Governor, senator, four Members of Parliament and eight women MCAs.

Other Counties that have notable improvement in the number of elected women include Murang'a, Kiambu, and Kisumu Counties.

However, there are counties that did not elect any **PAGE>>11**

<<FROM PAGE 10 woman in all the seats except for the women representative position. They include Garisa, Mandera, Marsabit, Kajiado and Nyamira counties.

Interventions in place

The improvement in the number of women elected has been linked to a series of interventions that included the amendments in the Elections Act and the Political Parties Act (PPA) which helped to improve the electoral environment.

Further, all the political parties put in place mechanisms to bolster the participation of women in the election in the 2022 polls. The nomination fee was lowered for women candidates relative to their male counterparts.

This, according to the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), was a commendable initiative from the political parties.

In addition, the main political parties had given very crucial party positions to women, which were critical in decision-making within the party mechanism.

Other notable interventions by parties included nominating women to run for gubernatorial positions in party strongholds. For instance, the United Democratic Alliance (UDA), had four out of five women candidates contesting for the position of county governor (the second tier of leadership cadre) while Orange Democratic Party (ODM) and Wiper Democratic Movement-Kenya (WDM-K) had a

woman governor each in Siaya and Machakos counties, respectively.

These are the major parties that participated in the election, demonstrating that political parties have a role to play in advancing the realization the inclusion of women in political leadership in line with the constitution.

The Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA), which is made up of women parliamentarians, also contributed to improved performance through its leadership and mentorship programme that helped in training women who were aspiring to be leaders. The programme helped in encouraging women to participate in elective posts in general elections.

Moving forward

To maintain this momentum, KIPPRA wants the Office of Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) to consider coming up with a policy that ensures a proportion of public funds set aside for political parties are used to support women candidates in the electoral process.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) should also start training new women candidates and provide mentorship, while working with elected leaders to ensure that they are effective politicians.

These approaches will help to accelerate efforts to ensure the position and the many rights provided for women in the Constitution of Kenya 2010, and international instruments become a reality for those

seeking elective positions.

Apart from the gender equality provisions in the constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 provides that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) further acknowledges this right and opportunity for citizens to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives to vote and be elected in a democratic election and the universal and equal suffrage through a secret ballot.

The African Union's African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights acknowledges the importance of participation in public affairs as an essential element of democracy. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance also requires the African Union member states to acknowledge people's participation as an inalienable right of the people of the continent.

Among the most important principles in the governance of public affairs that has been a subject of debate over the years in Kenya is the quest to promote participatory democracy and make the participation of women a critical aspect of the system of governance and decision-making.

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Women governors pledge to deliver



Meru Governor elect Kawira Mwangaza who is one of seven women governors in Kenya. PHOTO JOYCE CHIMBI

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

The dream of the over 400 delegates at the Bomas of Kenya Constitution Review Conference to create 47 elective seats reserved for women leaders to represent special interests a decade ago is paying dividends.

Since then, hundreds of women leaders have ventured into the murky waters of politics, which had been a preserve of men, with

some even being elected Governors, Senators and Members of Parliament (MPs).

The list of pioneers and trail-blazers includes the first three women politicians to be elected Governors in 2017. They were: former Cabinet Ministers Anne Waiguru (Kirinyaga) and Charity Ngilu in Kitui, who had also served as MP for Kitui Central. The other was Bomet Governor, the late Joyce Laboso, who had also served as Deputy

Speaker of Kenya National Assembly and as Sotik MP.

In the August 9, 2022, the record of change-makers was broken when seven women were declared Governors out of 47 vacancies.

Breaking the glass ceiling

Governor Waiguru successfully defended her Kirinyaga seat and was later elected by her 46 colleagues as the first female chairperson of the influential Council of Governors. She had previously served as CoG Deputy Chairperson.

Other women Governors are: Susan Kihara, Nakuru County, Wavinya Ndeti (Machakos) Machakos county; Fatuma Achani (Kwale county); Cecily Mbarire, Embu County; Gladys Wanga, Homa Bay- County, and Kawira Mwangaza Meru County

The new women governors have vowed to transform their counties. In her acceptance speech, Mwangaza, who floored veteran politician and Cabinet Minister, Kiraitu Murungi, had the following to say: "The corrupt in the county government will face the full force of the law."

Nakuru Governor pledged to give clean accessible water supply to the residents saying that during her campaigns and meet-the-people tours women and their

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<<FROM PAGE 12 daughters identified it as their biggest problem.

Said Kihika: “The large industries and factories also raised concern regarding inadequate water supplies to run their businesses. In line with the Inter-governmental Act, I shall engage the national government to ensure we get a contractor to complete the Itare Dam as we will enter into negotiations with Baringo County for supply of water from Chemususu dam.”

Historic win

On her part, Achani, who became the first woman in Coast region to ascend to the coveted seat, said the campaigns were tough.

“It wasn’t an easy journey, the campaign was tough battling men and other even started demeaning me as a woman and even became personal.” For Wanga, good health and food security would be her priority.

Said Governor Wanga: “My government will ensure that healthcare becomes its first priority and I will stand by my statement that our people should not go to Kisii County to seek medical services, but rather access these services right here.”

In Machakos, Governor Ndeti pledged: “My government will put key focus on the agricultural

sector by providing affordable farm input and market produce for farmers.”



It wasn’t an easy journey, the campaign was tough battling men and others even started demeaning me as a woman and even became personal.

FATMA ACHANI

KWALE GOVERNOR



Gender agenda

In Embu. Mbarire said: “My first task will be to revive the healthcare system that was on its deathbed; and to clear the garbage piles that have become a common sight in all the towns across Embu County.”

Among the three women Senators elected in 2017, only Fatuma Dulo Adan managed to retain her Isiolo seat in the 2022 polls; Kihika vied for the Nakuru gubernatorial race and won; while former Cabinet Minister, Senate Deputy Speaker and Member of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), Prof Margaret Kamar, vied for the Uasin Gishu Governor’s seat and lost.

Prof Kamar has since been nominated as a Senator by her political party, Jubilee, and has also been approved for Pan-African seat by The Kenyan Senate.

The other two elected women Senators in 2022 are: Business mogul, Tabitha Karanja (Nakuru) and politician Agnes Kavindu Mbuku (Machakos) who was reelected.

Some of the women pioneers who were elected as County Women Representatives, also known as County MPs, in the 2013, 2017 and 2022 General Election opted to either defend their seats or switch to other positions.

One of them, Gladys Boss Shollei of Uasin Gishu County, is the new Deputy Speaker in the National Assembly.

On her part, Nairobi Women Representative, Esther Parssaris, who is on her second term, reminded fellow women that funds are not the only way to win elective seats.

“Money is not everything in politics; yes, it is important, but you must know your niche and what your community needs. As women leaders, we must work as a team and focus on one item at a time,” says Parssaris.

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Beatrice Elachi, MP Dagoretti North, being interviewed by the media outside one of the polling stations during the August 2022 elections. PHOTO BY GEORGE NGESA

It is a bright future for elected and nominated women leaders

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

Women politicians who won elective seats in the August 9 General Elections have hit the ground running and keeping their eyes on defending and seeking bigger posts come 2027.

According to Deputy Speaker Gladys Shollei, who doubles as the Uasin Gishu Women Representative in the Kenya National Assembly, there is no turning back on increasing the number of women Governors, Senators, members of Parliament and Members of the County

Assembly.

Says Shollei: "In Kenya, we build women, but when they get up we bring them down and we miss the trajectory. Partners like UN Women should help women map out and find out their next plan for politics whether we win in the polls or not."

Addressing a media roundtable at a Nairobi Hotel where she was the guest of honour, Ms Shollei said: "Now that he is the President, let us now hold him accountable; that charter is nonpartisan, let us unite as women leaders and support its full

implementation. He was the first presidential candidate ever to sign a women's charter in the country's history. Let us leverage on it, we have political goodwill; let's use it to our benefit as women leaders and politicians."

In the charter, Kenya Kwanza says it will give women 50 per cent of the Cabinet slots and senior jobs in the government in line with affirmative action clause in the 2010 Constitution and the controversial 2/3 gender rule.

The Deputy Speaker urged fellow women leaders to

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<<FROM PAGE 14 relook at the 2/3 gender rule on the legislature and application in other arms of government holistically.

The constitutional requirement failed to be passed twice by 12th Parliament despite a Supreme Court ruling and political support from retired President Uhuru Kenyatta and ODM Leader, Odinga.

Former Chief Justice, David Maranga, also went further in a letter to President Kenyatta asking him to dissolve the 12th Parliament for not meeting the constitutional threshold, but it was not to be.

Addressing a roundtable forum attended by editors, elected and nominated women leaders in a Nairobi hotel, the Deputy Speaker said: "There is power if we support each other as women and we must always fight for our space no matter what."

But she also had sad news for the media, saying despite being a victim of defamation; she has learnt to work with the media as an elected leader.

"Some media houses only look for women to give them bad things to write and broadcast about them. This attitude must stop, I have sued two newspapers



May Cecilia Ayot is the former MCA for Laini Saba. PHOTO COURTESY

and I intend to use the fine imposed on them to promote women empowerment and mentorship programmes to teach them a lesson," says Shollei.

Earlier, the deputy secretary of Kenya Women Parliamentary Association, Charity Kathambi Chepkwony, who is also the Njoro MP, thanked voters for increasing the number of elected women Governors from three to seven and the number of elected MPs from 23 to 29 in the last polls, saying it was not a piece of cake, even for those who had been given direct party tickets as an incentive.

Kathambi praised some media houses that promoted affirmative action in their coverage during the campaigns, party

nominations and elections.

Julia Chege, shocked the participants when she disclosed that she spent Kshs18.5 million in the campaigns in Murangá county, but still lost. She still has a loan of Kshs1.5 million to pay.

Ms Chege and fellow politicians, have since formed The Kenya Political Women Caucus to cater for the interest of all women who vied but lost in the polls.

Meanwhile, Executive Director of Community Advocacy and Awareness (CRAWN) Trust, Daisy Amdanny, says women's political gains made in the August 9th polls must be taken to the next level.

Amdanny has appealed to women leaders to start by uniting and putting aside their partisan interests in Kenya Kwanza Coalition, led by President Ruto, and Azimio La Umoja, led by Odinga, and vigorously pursue the controversial 2/3 legislation.

Says Amdanny: "Women and civil society will pursue the Kenya Kwanza Women Charter, as it is beneficial to all women. At the same time, we must call the president out when he violates the law and commitments to women."

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Renewed interest in women leadership needed



Increased participation of women in governance can help meet Mama Mboga at her point of need. PHOTO COURTESY

BY SAUTI SASA CORRESPONDENT

Even though the electioneering period is over, the performance of women in the elections shows there is still much that needs to be done in regard to gender equality and equity.

“There is a need for continued civic education. The narrative that women ‘have been given’ enough seats should make us

all very uncomfortable,” says Dr. Grace Gakii, a gender, governance and development expert.

Gakii is disturbed that since the affirmative action seat was rolled out in 2013, women interested in non-affirmative and competitive seats “are told to do like other women and go for their seats.”

Gakii says that the danger in that narrative is slowly unfolding in the post-

election period.

“When a woman holds a position of power, it is taken as a favor, a token and yet Kenya has gone into great lengths to provide equity in leadership within the constitution and other legal frameworks. It is therefore means that we are still being held back by our own cultural beliefs,” says Desmond Karani Kagiri, a gender and governance expert.

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<<FROM PAGE 17 He says that even when the gender equality agenda gains traction as a bargaining chip during the electioneering period, the issue is quickly dropped after the elections.

“The issue of improving the representation of women in power or the underrepresentation of women in power is a challenge that should concern us all. There are certain levels of socio-development that we cannot reach without a gender balance,” he says.

Teresa Waithera, a former aspirant in Kabete, Nairobi County, explains how women leadership is promoted by politicians during an electioneering year only to be forgotten after the votes are counted.

“Every politician knows that the women vote is a game changer. Women are a constituency and an important one for that matter. There is usually no argument about how important women are. But our value diminishes overnight. Even the ordinary Kenyan begins to express discomfort once they begin to see more women holding positions,” Waithera observes.

“Before elections, Mama Mboga is the darling of every

politician, from the Member of the County Assembly, all the way to the top seat of the presidency. But where is Mama Mboga now? This distancing from Mama Mboga that politicians do the moment they reach their goal is an issue that must be discussed.”

Waithera says that the need for more women to hold key positions in the executive cannot be overemphasized. Research shows that the participation of women in leadership is two-pronged.

Women leaders are able to develop social protection programs that can sustainably address the challenges that Mama Mboga encounters on a day-to-day basis, and can help accelerate access to services that Mama Mboga need to build a solid business.

“If you go to any market be it a food market or cloths market, you will find large table banking groups that were started and sustained by women. Women in leadership understand the table banking mentality and can leverage on it in a win-win situation to help women in small businesses to move to the next level,” Waithaka explains.

“Women know how to save money, but they lack financial literacy and they

need support in this area. In this period when the government is still taking shape, women and like-minded stakeholders have a role to play to agitate for more representation of women in government.”

Research shows that mobilizing women to vote is as important as agitating for strong political participation of women.

Dr. Gakii agrees saying that creating policy frameworks for gender sensitive public governance is what Kenya needs to fully embrace.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), public governance “matters now more than ever for shaping a sustainable and a gender-inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.”

In this context, OECD finds emerging evidence to suggest “that taking action now to address gender equality would lead to significant gains in global GDP growth by 2030.”

“In managing related policy challenges, governments must balance the need for rapid responses with the need to uphold the values of transparency, fairness, accountability and inclusiveness.”

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More women needed in the political arena. PHOTO COURTESY

Women asked to keep pressing forward

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Kenyan women presence and interest in political leadership is not just for the sake of having power but a struggle to find solutions towards achieving sustainable Development Goals, poverty eradication, food security, and access to universal health care and education.

“A key objective of the majority of women that engage in politics is not only to gain power but also to use the leadership position to advance and or provide desired services or goods to the constituent group that they represent,” says Amb. Prof. Maria Nzomo in a paper titled Women in political leadership in Kenya: Access, Agenda Setting and Accountability.

Nzomo says access is defined as the process and outcome of “seeking entry to and or engagement with formal political structures such as parliaments and political parties.”

During the recently concluded general elections of 2022, a record number of women presented themselves to the electorate across all levels

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<<FROM PAGE 18 of political leadership leading to a record number of governors being elected in Meru, Homabay, Nakuru, Machakos, Embu, Kwale and Kirinyaga counties.

Still, the representation of women in structures including executive government positions, national parliaments, local governments and in public participation spaces is still worrying.

This is despite research showing that women address bread and butter issues that affect the ordinary Kenya and that women deliver well using public resources compared to many of their male counterparts.

"Kawira Mwangaza, governor of Meru County is a very good example. She did not print any campaign material in a bid for the governor position. She relied on the grass root work she was undertaking as a women representative," says Agnes Kaari, a political activist and member of Mbunge la Wananchi (the people's parliament).

Indeed, a survey conducted by Mizani Africa, a modern pan-African research firm that seeks to revolutionize the research industry, found that Governor Kawira was the top performing women representative in

Kenya ahead of the general elections.

Kawira scored 78.1 percent followed closely by Governor Gladys Wanga with 77.4 percent. It is indicative that the two top performing women representatives also made history by becoming the first female governors in their respective counties.

Says Kawira: "Instead of engaging in political debates on the formation of new political parties, I chose the awarding and disbursement of bursary allocation to the needy students of Meru County; supporting self-help groups, supporting students in schools with desks and chairs; and supporting the poor in Meru County who are sleeping hungry every day."

"We are indeed moving in the right direction but we need to pick up speed. There is significant upheaval on the global stage and we need leaders who can provide stability at both the national and local levels," says Titus Kimeu, a member of Mbunge la Wananchi.

He adds that women leaders are generally less corrupt and tend to invest in projects that are socially transformative, adding that women can be trusted to deliver on their political manifestos.

"Women are honest. This is the character that women bring into leadership. The government is still taking shape and positions. But it is important that we as Wanjiku continue to actively agitate for women leadership."

Kimeu says that the greatest misstep that women make is to go back to their cocoons after an election forgetting that the government has a cake that is continuously being sharing. When women go quiet, it is men who end up getting the biggest share of this leadership cake."

By now, he notes, women ought to have begun releasing data showing where women stand in relation to representation for appointments in the executive, nominations in parliament and house committees.

"How many women are in influential house committees, how many women are chairing these committees, these are questions that all those in support of women leadership should be able to answer by now. But the business-as-usual model is often to wait until the ship has sailed to begin releasing press releases. This is the time to stand up and speak," he says.

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