

# SautiSasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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**Beyond elections:  
refocusing on the  
gender agenda**



Women leaders discuss their role in governance in the post 2022 elections era.

# Unregulated campaign financing hurt women

BY FAITH MUIRURI

**T**he women movement wants women MPs to reintroduce the campaign finance bill to help create an equal playing ground in future elections.

The movement led by Daisy Amdany of Crawn Trust feels that there is need to cap campaign financing in future elections to help create a level playing field for all candidates.

According to Amdany, most women shy away from elective positions because of the current commercialization of politics.

“The trend of commercialized politics is locking many Kenyans especially women and youth who genuinely want to serve the country in elective

positions.”

“We need to refocus our energies on campaign financing law. It cannot be that we will go for another election without the campaign Financing Act. We need to regulate the amount of money we spent on elections. It is too much and we need to have a law regulating campaign time.”

During the 2022 elections, a total of 1,962 women candidates contested for different elective seats. This translated to 12.18 percent of the 16,100 candidates cleared for the 2022 polls.

However, women only account for 10.6 percent of the elected leaders across all the six elective seats. Although this is up from 9.1 percent in 2017 and 7.7 percent of elected leaders in 2013, it does not meet the gender

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<<FROM PAGE 2 threshold of not more two thirds outlined in the Constitution.

According to Daniel Waitere, a representative from the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), campaign financing worked against women candidates during the polls. “When you look at the amount of resources pumped into the last election, you will understand why only a few women were elected.”

Julia Nyokabi who contested for the Kangema Parliamentary seat on a Democratic Party ticket echoes similar sentiments saying she spent about 18 million for the national assembly seat but lost. “The 2022 General Elections were very expensive and I still have a debt of Ksh1.2 million to pay after losing the elections.

Rachael Nyamae, the MP Kitui South opines that politics in Kenya have become very expensive and unless women are assured of political party’s support, the numbers will remain low.

“Majority of the women are not corrupt, and therefore they do not amass a lot of wealth which their male counterparts use to mount robust campaigns.”

On her part, Sheila Masinde of Transparency International says we must ensure equal access to office. “There are certain segments of the society who will never access that office because they don’t have money.”

She singles out women, young people and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) among groups that are completely disenfranchised in the political processes due to the issue of money. “The ability for them to participate marginalizes them further. It is a double tragedy for a woman who is young and living with disability.”

She says that the moment your opponent is able to use dirty money accrued from illicit activities, the playing field is no longer fair. It goes against the principles of free and fair elections.

Mulle Musau of Election Observation Group (ELOG), concurs and argues that the reason we have a law that caps campaign financing is to avoid uneven playing field.

He says that current situation has been fueled by political parties that continuously demand for

money from those seeking elective positions. “For you to be considered by the party, you need to display your financial muscle.”

“Majority of the women, youth and PWDs did not have the kind of money that was required to be able to influence decisions at the political party level. Majority ended up forfeiting opportunities to the much more resourced contenders who are men,” says Musau when he released a report on the just concluded General Elections where ELOG had deployed observers across the country.

The ELOG official says that very few seats in regards to the single member constituency, Senate and governors positions that were contested were free and fair. Majority were settled in the board rooms.

Beth Syengo, a nominated senator agrees with the ELOG findings and points out that the playing ground is not level for women because Kenyan politics is about who has money to induce voters.

She says that besides using un-orthodox means to slow the campaigns of their female counterparts such as violence and propaganda, men massively bribed their way into victory.

During the last elections, law makers rejected proposed regulations by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to cap election campaign financing.

The Election Campaign Financing Act that sought to ban contributions by foreign governments was passed in 2013 with a rider that it would take effect in 2017.

The Electoral Commission tabled revised regulations in August 2021 but the politicians shot it down on the basis that they were gazetted without parliament’s approval. They passed a statutory deadline of at least 12 months before the elections.

If the laws had been adopted, political parties and candidates would have been allowed to raise their own campaign funds and regulate their expenditure during the campaign period.

The parliamentary decision not to enforce a cap on campaign spending was yet another blow to chapter six of the Constitution on integrity.

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# Boosting the women agenda in the post-election period



Voters lining to vote during the August 2022 elections. Several women broke glass ceilings in these elections.

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

Despite women of Kenya having limitless potential to transform the socio-economic spheres of their lives, patriarchy and other cultural practices continue to hold women back.

“When Martha Karua became a running mate and the first woman to hold that position in a major political party, it was jubilation across the country. In her nomination, we saw light at the end of the tunnel. In the post-election period, women must now re-group so that we can build from that gain to propel the women

agenda forward,” said May Cecilia Ayot, former Member of County Assembly (MCA), Laini Saba.

She won the seat in the 2017 elections. Growing up in the sprawling Kibra Slums, she came face to face with poverty, destitution, desperation and it was difficult to see a way out.

“I come from a very humble background and I have worked as a house girl to make ends meet. It took a lot of effort to go back to school and get an education,” she says.

She graduated with a Certificate in Government Economic Policy from Alison Advanced Learning. He also holds a Certificate **PAGE>>5**



<<FROM PAGE 4 in County Management from the Kenya College of Accountancy, a Diploma in Philosophy and Religious Study from Consolata Institute of Philosophy; and a Certificate in Home Management from the Daughters of the Heart of Mary college and various short course certifications.

Speaking to journalists during a training organized by the African Woman and Child Feature Service, Ayot says that hers is the story of many Kenyan women. "To look forward and move up, we must also acknowledge that the playing field has never been fair for women. We must also find ways to balance these playing fields. Elections in Kenya are becoming very expensive and women cannot match the financial muscle that men have," she says.

Ayot further noted that women have a tough road ahead. "The case of Kawira Mwangaza and the pressure, tension and conflict that followed her inauguration and her impeachment shows that the road ahead is not very smooth for women."

Governor Kawira was elected in a win that left the country astounded. As an independent candidate, she became the first woman governor of Meru County, a strongly patriarchal society. But the hostility that has followed her shows signs of challenges that lie ahead. Luckily, the Senate disapproved the motion by the County Assembly to impeach her.

"Kawira's story deserves to be documented and studied. She brilliantly used the little she had to get to the top seat. As women, we can

model our success alongside such stories. But because we come from very tough backgrounds with shaky financial positions, once we are elected, we are afraid to rattle the powers that be," says Ayot.

She notes that: "When you go against the grain, you encounter problems that could even finish you politically. My battles with the water cartels in Nairobi affected my political bid in 2022 but I am still in the race for a seat come 2027."

Ayot feels journalists should be more proactive in interviewing women so as to avoid contributing to the victimization of women in leadership.

Her main agenda now is to fight against sexual and gender based violence as well as water cartels particularly in the informal settlements. She says that sex for water remains rampant and that women in the slums are still grappling with the problem due to water scarcity and high water prices.

"As a woman, if you hold a powerful position and can amplify the voices of women, do it. During interviews, women are afraid because we feel that there is an agenda to ambush us, trip us up and embarrass us," she observes.

She said women should use campaigns such as the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence to speak out about violations women and girls go through and their rights.

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**Kawira's story deserves to be documented and studied. She brilliantly used the little she had to get to the top seat. As women, we can model our success alongside such stories. But because we come from very tough backgrounds with shaky financial positions, once we are elected, we are afraid to rattle the powers that be.**

May Cecilia Ayot, former Member of County Assembly (MCA), Laini Saba.







Hellen Muchunu, Gender & Governance Programme Analyst at UN Women.

# Women leaders prove breaking glass ceiling is possible

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

**T**here is no doubt that Kenyan women have continued to get the short end of the stick despite making up over 50 percent of the population of 48 million.

The number of women elected to chair Senate and parliamentary committees and those nominated to the Cabinet and as Principal Secretaries still leave a lot to be desired 59 years after independence.

Gladys Shollei, a former Registrar of the High Court and Uasin Gishu Women Representative, has been elected Deputy Speaker of Kenya National Assembly. Another women leader who has been elevated is former Cabinet Minister and Kirinyaga Governor, Anne Waiguru, who was elected as the chairperson of the Council of

Governors (CoG), the first woman to ever occupy the influential seat.

Further seven women have been appointed in the 22 member Cabinet. In the Governor position, the seven women who were elected make up 6.7 per cent of members of the Council of Governors. The good news is that they are double the number of women elected to that office in 2017 when former Cabinet Ministers Charity Ngilu (Kitui), Anne Waiguru (Kirinyaga) and former deputy Speaker, Joyce Laboso (Bomet) broke the glass ceiling and made history and clinched the hotly-contested seats.

## Gender Scorecard

But as expected, women got 100 per cent of the 47 County Women Representatives, also known as County MPs seats, exclusively **PAGE>>7**

<<FROM PAGE 6 reserved for them thanks to the Affirmative Action clause in the 2010 Constitution.

The insensitivity of political parties and voters in some regions of the country on gender matters showed its ugly head again among the 345 MPs elected across the country, where only 29 are women. This was however an improvement from 2017 when they were only 23.

The performance of women at the 47 county assemblies left a lot to be desired. Out of the 1,450 seats up for grabs, only 115 made it to the ballot box. This was an improvement from 98 in 2017.

Indeed, all is not lost, if the conversations by over 20 elected women leaders and their colleagues who attended a post-mortem meeting in Nairobi organized by the Journalists for Human Rights, Kenya Editor's Guild and Global Affairs Canada is anything to go by.

The Nairobi roundtable on reflections on female politician's performance in 2022 polls was graced by Deputy Speaker Shollei, who was the key note speaker.

The roundtable at a city hotel, was attended by members of Kenya Editors Guild and journalists from print and electronic media houses who fielded questions from some of the over 20 elected and nominated MPs and a Senator present.

The women leaders in attendance were: Shollei (Uasin Gishu Women Rep); Jayne Kihara (Naivasha); Beatrice Kemei (Kericho Women Rep); Joyce Osogo (Homa Bay); Haika Mizighi (Taita-Taveta Rep); Charity Kathambi (Njoro); Dorothy Muthoni (Nominated MP); Mary Emaase (Teso East); and Beatrice Adagala (Vihiga Women Rep).

Others were Beatrice Nkatha (Women Rep Tharaka Nithi); Susan Chebet (Elgeyo Marakwet Women Rep); Cynthia Muge (Nandi Women Rep); Doris Donya Aburi (Kisii Women Rep); Beatrice Kemei (Kericho Women Rep); Phillis Barto (Moiben MP), Rachel Nyamai (Kitui South), Edith Nyenze (Kitui West) MP and Nominated Senator Niraj Abdilahi.

Earlier, the forum was addressed by Kenya Editors Guild President, Churchill Otieno, Hellen Muchunu, a Gender and Governance Programme analysts at of UN Women, Daisy Amdanny CRAWN Trust, Sammy Muraya (Journalists for Human Rights), Dinah Ondari (Media Council of Kenya), and Daniel Waitere from National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC).

According to NGEC, there were eight elected women Deputy Governors in Trans-Nzoia, Kiambu, Murang'a, Narok, Makueni, Kilifi, Taita Taveta and Bungoma Counties.

A record 29 women were elected as MPs spread across 18 counties. Nakuru County leads with four elected women MPs, followed by Homa Bay, Murang'a, and Kitui counties. Kiambu, Makueni, and Uasin Gishu Counties have each two elected women MPs.

The following 11 counties have one elected woman MP; they are Nairobi, Kisumu, Lamu, Narok, Nandi, Kilifi, Laikipia, Mombasa, Samburu, Nyandarua, and Busia.

But women fared poorly compared to the male counterparts among the 17 young people who were elected to various positions. According to NGEC, one male youth governor (Elgeyo-Marakwet), two male youth senators (Nyandarua and Migori counties), three male youth Members of Parliament (from Oljororok Constituency in Nyandarua; Mumias East Constituency in Kakamega; and Saboti Constituency in Trans-Nzoia county), one female youth (Bomet County Woman Representative), and 10 male youth to the County Assemblies of Nyandarua, Makueni, Nairobi, Kajiado, Kiambu, and Kericho.

The Commission has also documented five elected Persons with Disabilities (PLW); two male Members of Parliament (Westlands constituency in Nairobi, and Webuye East Constituency in Bungoma County); one female as Makueni County Woman MP; and two male Members of County Assemblies of Kiambu and Siaya.

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# The 13th Parliament has to get it right on the Two Thirds Rule



Gladys Shollei addressing women leaders at meeting held in Nairobi hotel late 2022.

BY FAITH MUIRURI

**T**he gender equality provisions in the Constitution were again put to test during the 2022 General Elections.

This was the third poll after comprehensive changes were introduced by Constitution 2010. However, an assessment of the performance of most political parties and their representation in parliament clearly indicates that as a nation, we are still below the bare minimum of 30%.

According to the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), women still account for the minority after the August poll, comprising 24.8 percent of the elected leaders at the national level.

While this has been rated as a significant milestone, women guaranteed rights in the Constitution are yet to materialize.

Article 27 (6) for instance places a positive obligation on the state to put in place legislative measures to redress past wrongs. Beyond legislative action, the state is required to use affirmative action and policy measures to ensure that inequalities are corrected.

In addition to the measures under Article 27 (6), Article 27 (8) of the constitution requires the State to ensure that not more than two thirds of the members of any elective or appointive body are of the same gender.

Secondly, Article 81(b) reinforces Article 27(8) by stating that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender.

Thirdly, Article 91(1)(f) requires that political parties respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, and gender equality and equity. In particular, Article 90(2)(b) of the Constitution mandates political parties

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<<FROM PAGE 8 to ensure that each party list for nominations comprises the appropriate number of qualified candidates and alternates between male and female candidates in the priority in which they are listed.

In addition to the Constitutional provisions, there have been legislations, regulations, judicial decisions and international treaties that have contributed immensely to the gains contained in the constitution.

Despite this progress in legal, policy and institutional reforms, the number of women elected in parliament falls short the threshold provided in the Constitution.

As a result of this, Kenya continues to rank poorly within the Eastern African region in women's political representation. For instance, Rwandese election of 2018 had 49 out of 80 seats in the Lower House going to women, representing 61.3%. In the Ethiopian elections for 2021, women bagged 195 seats out of the total of 470 seats, representing 41.5%. Similar trends were replicated in Uganda's 2021 General Elections where women garnered 188 out of 556 seats in Parliament, representing 33.8%.

Back in Kenya, women parliamentarians are now exploring options to make gender equality provisions in the Constitution a reality.

"We want to come up with holistic formula that will not only integrate elective positions but appointive positions in the government," says Gladys Sholei, who is the Deputy Speaker in the National Assembly.

According to Sholei, women parliamentarians are looking at previous proposals on meeting the gender two thirds rule with the intent of coming up with a holistic formulae that captures both elective and appointive seats.

"We are working towards making sure the 13th parliament enacts the two thirds gender principle.

At the moment, we want to agree on what the formula will be."

She says that already there is political will from the presidency. "We have a commitment by President William Ruto to support the legislation required to effect the Constitutional provision. We strongly believe that he will whip up members to support the implementation of two thirds gender rule," she adds.

Daisy Amdany of Crawn Trust underscores the need to exploit the pronouncements by the President who has insisted that women are not going to be peripheral in his government.

She says if the President in any way reneges on this commitment, civil society organizations will have no option but to continue with litigation in the courts to pressure Parliament to prioritize the same.



**We want to come up with holistic formula that will not only integrate elective positions but appointive positions in the government,**

Gladys Sholei, Deputy Speaker in the National Assembly.



"One of the main reasons for the failure is that Members of Parliament are mainly men who stand to lose if the gender equality provisions are implemented. The only way out is for courts to hold as unconstitutional the composition of Parliament in violation of the Constitutional principle, as that would force parties to find ways of adhering to the principle."

She added. "Even as we talk about the implementation of the two thirds gender rule, we must also look at Article 81b and introduce amendments to the Elections Act and the Political Parties Act because political parties still hold the key to political representation."

"We need to refocus on the primary processes to get more women elected. We are always looking at the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the real players are political parties and Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP). Once you are able to negotiate at that level, then you are half way there.

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Homabay Woman Representative Joyce Osogo and other women call for action on gender Two Third Rule.

# Women Leaders now demand action on the gender Two Thirds Rule

BY ODHIAMBO ORLALE

**K**enyan women have heard more than enough promises on affirmative action; now they want action.

They now want to see the words and pledges converted into action in terms of leadership positions in the Legislature and in the Executive arm of government.

According to Githunguri MP, Gathoni wa Muchomba, who doubles as chairperson of Kenya Women Parliamentary Association, time for pledges is over. It is now time to give women leaders what they deserve in decision-making positions in Parliament, Senate and as Cabinet Ministers and Permanent Secretaries and Parastatal heads.

Said the chairperson: "We are no longer interested in tokenism as was the case in the past, we demand to be given leadership positions by

right and under the 2/3 gender rule clause in the 2010 Constitution."

The KEWOPA chairperson lamented that despite signing the Women's Charter on the eve of the last General Election and also pledging to give women 50 per cent of slots in his Cabinet, if elected, President William Ruto had since reneged.

Out of the 21 Cabinet Secretaries worn-in by President Ruto, only seven are women. Addressing a stakeholders' forum in a Nairobi hotel, the Githunguri MP, who made history as the first woman to be elected MP in that constituency, also took issue with the appointing of nine male MPs to chair all the parliamentary committees.

Muchomba thanked Kenyans for electing a record seven women Governors; three Senators; 29 MPs and 115 MCAs across the country.

On her part, Nairobi Women **PAGE>>11**

**<<FROM PAGE 10** 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.

KEWOPA chairperson expressed optimism that more women would be identified and considered for other senior posts in the new government as diplomats or heads of State Corporations.

Earlier, the women leaders shared the challenges they faced during party primaries, campaigns and even after some of them were elected.

Busia Women Representative, Catherine Omanyoo, confessed how in 2017 when she was 27 years and vied for a parliamentary seat her critics told her she was too young, and needed to get married.

“But come 2022, I managed to convince my people to elect me as County Women MP. Most did not know the difference between Women MP and County Governor!” says Omanyoo.

On her part, Migori Women MP, Fatuma Zainab Mohamed, recalled that in order to win the elections, she had to put on a feminine face in the campaigns to outwit her male rivals.

“Sometimes, us women politicians, we fail because we plunge into politics, which has been a man’s game, and forget about putting a feminine face to it. We instead put a tough face during campaigns which scares away fellow women and men supporters,” says Mohamed.

On her part, youthful Udgoon Siyad, Garissa Women Rep says she sailed through without having a Godfather to protect campaign and fund her campaigns in the vast county in North Eastern Kenya.

Says Siyad: “I was dismissed by my critiques as a divorcee, and single mother to block me from contesting, but I was helped, inspired and empowered by some of the NGOs like Uraia who held my hand and helped me soldier on. Not all women politicians were as lucky as I was. All women

in Garissa who vied for MCA slots did not succeed. We need such forums, as this organized by UN Women and KEWOPA, in Garissa, to encourage our fellow women leaders.”

Former Kisumu Deputy Governor, Ruth Odinga, who is now the Kisumu Women MP, revealed how she has been discriminated against not only for being a woman, but also for coming from a political family.

According to Odinga, her critics blocked her from vying for the gubernatorial race in 2017 forcing her to talk to former Karachuonyo MP, Phoebe Asiyo, to have her party ODM, nominate her as a running mate.

And as a deputy governor, the discrimination was “humongous” throughout her five-year tenure with intrigues from both men and women, within and outside her office.

One of the women parliamentary candidates, who lost, Julia Chege, said her 5,000 votes for the Kangema seat was not easy to get, but she has learnt from the experience to change her tactics in the next elections.

Chege is now urging both elected and unelected women leaders to unite and work together to ensure the two third gender rule is implemented: “Each woman MP should adopt four male MPs to lobby for the Rule to be passed in the legislature.”

Homa Bay County Women MP, Joyce Osogo aka Bensouda, said: “Let’s not wait to be given power as women, we must learn to grab power and to seek consensus!”

Others who spoke were Irene Mayaka MP representing Virtually Impaired Persons (VIPs); Phillis Bartoo (Moiben MP); Beatrice Elachi and Gertrude Mbeyo (Kilifi County MP).

Elachi, who is the only woman elected MP in the capital city, requested donors like UN Women to start early preparations in the election cycle in order to prepare women well before major elections are held.

Kilifi Women MP said her rise from an MCA to her current seat in past decade was not easy; one needs to be strategic, persistent and assertive.

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# The battle for gender equality has just begun



Sen. Beth Syengo speaking to media in a past meeting. She called on women to work across party lines for gender equality to happen

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

**T**he late professor and Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai once said that “human rights are not things that are put on the table for people to enjoy. These are things you fight for and then you protect.”

It is a message that deeply resonates with the Kenyan woman who has to fight for space from birth and to death, for even in death, their rights for a decent burial are still not guaranteed.

Maathai life demonstrated this fight all too well, rising from the slopes of aberdare ranges in Nyeri County to join the historic airlift to America as one of 800 East African students supported by Barack Obama Snr. She became an indelible mark in

Kenya’s history.

“But these historic moments for women in Kenya are becoming fewer and far in between, for even after the first woman entered parliament in 1969, it is still not yet Uhuru for the Kenyan woman,” says Damaris Wanjau, a female politician in Kiambu County and a former aspirant for the MCA position.

The 2022 Kenyan polls were the third elections to be conducted after the enactment of the Constitution of Kenya 2010. The year 1969 was a historic one as it marks the first time a woman was elected to Kenya’s parliament.

In Parliament, Grace Onyango was the first woman to sit on the speaker’s chair as temporary deputy speaker, and served as Deputy **PAGE>>13**

<<FROM PAGE 12 Speaker from 1979 to 1984.

Onyango, a fiery woman leader entered Kenya's political hall of fame by becoming the first woman Member of Parliament in post-independence Kenya.

This was in 1969 and the first time a woman was elected to Kenya's Parliament. Even though women elected to powers have been on the rise since then, the political landscape remains predominantly male.

This is in spite of the significant legal and institutional reforms which have enhanced the environment for participation of women in the political discourse and governance in Kenya.

UN Women research finds that balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making is the internationally agreed target set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. But like Kenya, most countries in the world have not achieved gender balance, and few are set or met ambitious targets for gender parity.

Further, UN Women finds that women demonstrate political leadership by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses—even in the most politically combative environments—and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform.

"On paper, Kenya is a gender sensitive country where women only have to reach out and capture whatever positions they want, but the reality is far from it. There is a lot of

work that must be done to bridge existing gender gaps in leadership. This includes sustained civic education and a social movement to change strong patriarchal views of leadership that hold women back," says Christine Nyaboke, a political analyst and university lecturer.

According to the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (Kippra): "Despite progress in legal, policy, and institutional reforms, the number of women participating in the electoral process falls short of the aspirations envisaged. 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 12.8 percent."

Again, in the 2022 general elections held on 9th August 2022, women formed the minority, comprising 24.8 percent of the elected leaders at the National level."

Kippra reinforces the United Nations position which 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."

It recommends that 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."

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**On paper, Kenya is a gender sensitive country where women only have to reach out and capture whatever positions they want, but the reality is far from it. There is a lot of work that must be done to bridge existing gender gaps in leadership. This includes sustained civic education and a social movement to change strong patriarchal views of leadership that hold women back,**

Christine Nyaboke, a political analyst and university lecturer.





Dorcas Muga-Odumbe, editor at Natiion Media Group, making a point on the role of the media in sustaining conversations around women leadership and affirmative action.

# Women must reclaim their leadership space

BY SAUTI SASA CORRESPONDENT

**T**he 1979 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women highlights the importance of equal participation of women in public life. While Kenyan women's participation in leadership dates back to the pre-colonial era, they remain underrepresented.

But it is the issue of women at grassroots levels and their influence on local politics that Dr. Agnes

Gakii, a gender and development expert says must now come under the spotlight.

"Women are extremely critical and central to any election in this country. They are the cornerstone of any political base, but are they silenced or do they chose to remain silent after an election. Mind you their voice is equally important during a post-election period," she says.

Mary Atieno says that there are many factors that lead to the loud silence from **PAGE>>15**



<<FROM PAGE 14 women after elections. “Before elections, women are lured with goodies such as lesos, t-shirts and hand outs, and many promises of how their lives will be changed. Women are emotional and they want to feel that they matter.”

“These words of how important we are speak to our hearts and we get carried our way. But after elections, we are usually forgotten as usual. No photos of politicians buying our bananas and oranges, no photos of our politicians drinking our porridge on the road side and eating chapati.”

Gakii concurs saying that the strong presence of women through grassroots social movements are often very visible ahead of any general election, calling for peace and tolerance, and their support is much sought after.

The demographics of the Kenyan voter according to the National Registration Bureau statistics show that there are more women eligible to vote at any given election.

Despite women being backed by international, regional and national legal and policy frameworks, they remain the silent majority, unable to influence political decision making processes. Yet, Kenya has one of the most progressive, gender sensitive legal frameworks in Africa.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 provides that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.”

Additionally, 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.

Further, 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.

The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (Kippra), an international center for excellence in public policy and research notes: “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.”

“The protracted struggles for democratic reforms in Kenya led to the promulgation of the Kenyan Constitution 2010, with Article 10 enshrining democracy and participation of the citizens among the values and principles of the system of governance. The fundamental issues surrounding the contribution of women in the political processes, and the gains and challenges that still impede the right and position of women in the process are highlighted in this discussion,” it adds.

Unfortunately, notes Gakii, women remain timid when it comes to political participation, afraid of being profiled, harassed due to the nature of Kenyan politics.

“But it is a high time that women understood that the changes we want can only be made from within. We cannot shy away from public participation in town halls, we cannot be too busy to make our presence known and our voices heard, we must step up for present and future generations. They depend on our capacity to pursue and implement caring leadership.”

She calls on women in villages and towns not be intimidated into politics of tokenism. Every Kenyan who meets the leadership threshold, be they male or female, have been given equal rights by the Constitution to pursue leadership positions.

“Only women can help Wanjiku to move away from that mind set by stepping into political spaces and there is room for more women to do so and the time is now,” She says.

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