

Sauti Sasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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The Twists and Turns in Women Leadership



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Few women participating in the critical parliamentary committees

BY AWC FEATURES
CORRESPONDENT

Great efforts have gone into getting more women into parliament where they can influence decision making processes, especially on issues that affect women and other vulnerable groups in the society.

But it is emerging that once in parliament, women are facing another obstacle in getting into key decision-making structures, especially the parliamentary committees.

An analysis conducted by African Woman and Child Feature Service shows out of the 44 committees in the National Assembly, only three or 6.8% – the Regional Integration Committee, the Social Protection Committee and the Liaison Committee- are chaired by women.

The Liaison Committee is the one with both a woman as a chairperson and vice chairperson. Some key committees such as the Transport and Infrastructure Committee do not have a single female as a member. Public Accounts committee whose main role is to check the government, has only one female member out of the 15 members.

The Budget Appropriations Committee, which discusses and reviews budget estimates and makes recommendations to Parliament that impact on the lives and the livelihoods of ordinary people, has five female



members and a female vice chairperson.

Same applies to Public Accounts Committee, which oversees public funds and ensures they are used efficiently and in accordance with government regulations. It has only one female member out of the 15 members.

The committees with the most women are the Social Protection Committee and Labour Committee with eight and five women members respectively.

Justice and Legal Affairs

Committee, which handled the National Dialogue Committee (Nadco) bills, has three female members out of the 15. Small numbers of women in these committees that are dominated by their male counterparts makes it very difficult for them to influence decisions.

Parliamentary committees are small, but powerful groups of members which assist Parliament in its functions. They are very vital structures in a functional democracy. The committees examine issues in more detail **PAGE>>4**

<<FROM PAGE 3 manner than Parliament as a whole, investigate maladministration or corruption, and review proposals to amend old laws or enact new ones, among many other responsibilities.

For example, the two thirds gender principle hit a snag this year after the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee set aside a report recommending more seats for women. They said this should be pushed for implementation during the 2027 general elections.

The proposed amendments to Article 97 and Article 98 of the constitution were to ensure not more than two-thirds of MPs are of the same gender.

However, Justice and Legal Affairs Committee members shot down the proposal, terming the immediate top-up as 'overly ambitious'.

"The committee noted the proposal would pose a significant implementation challenge during the term of the current Parliament.

The committee, chaired by Tharaka MP Gitonga Murugara then recommended, "It will be neater to implement the proposals after the term of the current Parliament. The proposal is too ambitious and cannot be implemented in the current Parliament.

Rarieda MP Otiende Amollo said the proposed changes require a referendum as "they relate to the sovereignty of the people".

"It indirectly affects the functions of Parliament by

enlarging the membership of the two Houses through top-up seats," he said.

Currently, there are 81 women in the National Assembly and 21 in the Senate. National Assembly has 268 men which constitutes 76.8 per cent, against a population of 81 women which constitutes 23.2 per cent.

Senate on the other hand has 46 men – both elected from the counties and nominated; hence 23 women are required to meet the gender principle.

Parliamentary committee membership is largely influenced by political parties and in most cases by the party with majority members.

Except for Public Accounts committee, whose main role is to check the government, all committees in the National Assembly are chaired by MPs from the majority side of the house.

A communications officer from Parliament says cases of some committees having no or few women are as a result of the few female MPs in Parliament.

"But each MP sits in at least two committees. Parties have a huge role in deciding which MP sits in which committee," he said.

To increase the number of women in these committees, it follows that more women need to be elected and nominated as Members of Parliament and Senators, especially by the Parliament enacting a law to implement the Two Thirds gender principle.

A formula to achieve exactly that was recommended by a

multisectoral working group on the two thirds gender principle formed by former Cabinet Secretary, Aisha Jumwa. The working group recommended that after every election, the missing gender would be topped up. To achieve this, the National Assembly would have 453 members while the Senate 74. The task force further broke down the cost of the top-up and made recommendations of how the money can be generated.

"Daily government revenue collection is Sh5.19 billion per day in the FY/2023 and so the annual amount for an added 55 member to the National Assembly and the Senate to bring to the constitutional compliance is equivalent to less than a day's revenue collection in Kenya," the report says.

Another proposal in the report is to have the Political Parties Act amended to ensure political party candidate lists have met the two-thirds gender threshold.

Gender expert Daisy Amdany said it is time Parliament stopped making the two-thirds gender principle a moving target.

The promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 cast a new dawn towards the actualisation of the two-thirds gender rule.

The provisions of Article 97 and 98 form an integral part of the legal framework of the two-thirds rule. Article 90 echoes these stipulations and indicates the role that political parties and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission have in achieving the agenda.

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Five Political Parties Suspended over non-Compliance with the Gender Rule



Anne Nderitu, Registrar of Political Parties

BY HENIX OBUCHUNJU

As the country struggles to implement the Not More than Two Gender Principle that will ensure a fair political representation of women

and men; institutions expected to lead the way in the realization of this principle are faltering on the issue.

One of the key pillars and pathways to gender equality in political representation are the

political parties. That is why there is a law that requires political parties to adhere to the Gender Rule for them to be compliant with the law that regulates political parties operations.

But this is not happening, and action is now being taken to enforce this law. According to the Registrar of Political Parties, Ann Nderitu, five political parties have been suspended for failing to comply with the country's political party regulations.

While she did not disclose the identities of the parties, Nderitu stated that their suspension was due to a range of violations, including non-compliance with the gender representation requirement.

Under the Kenyan law, political parties are required to ensure that at least one-third of their governing bodies are composed of either gender.

Nderitu stressed that these parties had been repeatedly warned and advised on how to meet the required standards but chose to ignore the guidance.

"We had advised them on how to comply with the rules, but they chose to ignore this. Until when they prove to us, through the set procedures, that they are in compliance, we will not allow them to proceed with their activities," said Nderitu insisting that these measures were critical to enforcing the two-thirds gender rule, which is a fundamental part of Kenyan law.

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The Political Parties Act (2016) requires that to attain full registration, political parties must ensure that both their membership and governing body reflect gender balance. The act states that not more than two-thirds of a party's governing body can be of the same gender.

"This is not just a guideline; it is the law, and my office is tasked with making sure that parties adhere to it."

The Registrar said that her office makes deliberate efforts to ensure both male and female representatives are present during meetings with political parties. This, she said, is part of a wider strategy to amplify women's voices, which have historically been marginalized in the political arena.

"When we engage with political parties, we insist on having both male and female representatives at the table. This is intentional because we want to ensure that women, who have been marginalized in politics for so long, are heard," Nderitu said.

She further noted that her office has the authority to deregister political parties that fail to comply with the gender rule.

"In extreme cases, we have had to deregister parties for non-compliance. One of the reasons a party can be deregistered is their failure to meet the two-thirds gender rule," she stated.

The Political Parties Act (2016) also established a Political Party Fund, with provisions to promote gender inclusivity. A percentage of the Political Party Fund is

specifically allocated to support parties that field candidates from special interest groups, including women.

"This allocation is an incentive for political parties to nominate more female candidates during elections," says Nderitu

She however points out that political parties with only male elected officials do not qualify for the fund.



In extreme cases, we have had to deregister parties for non-compliance. One of the reasons a party can be deregistered is their failure to meet the two-thirds gender rule.

ANNE NDERITU, REGISTRAR OF POLITICAL PARTIES



"If a party has only male politicians who were elected, they are less likely to benefit from the fund." Even for those that benefit, Nderitu's says her office closely monitors how parties use the funds they receive to promote the welfare of the marginalized groups.

"We require that parties submit audited reports and a work plan to demonstrate how they will use the funds to promote the inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. No funds are disbursed until we approve their work plan," she says.

In 2022, Kenyans elected 29 women as Members of Parliament, an increase from 23 in 2017. The number of female governors rose to seven, compared to three in 2017, while the count of female senators remained unchanged at three.

In the same election, United Democratic Alliance (UDA) emerged with the highest number of women elected to the National Assembly, securing 14 seats. Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) followed with seven women elected to the National Assembly, while Jubilee Party managed to have four women MPs. Wiper Democratic Movement (WDM-K) elected three women, and KANU contributed one female MP.

Nderitu argues that the more political parties nominate women during primaries, the more the likelihood of them being elected at the ballot.

Those who lost are also not being left behind by Nderitu's office. To support the women who lost in previous elections, her office has developed a manual that offers strategies for fundraising and running again in future elections.

"We work with other institutions to engage these women, giving them strategies on how to fundraise and package themselves as candidates for future elections," she says.

"We also provide them with access to counselors who offer psychosocial support, helping them regain their confidence."

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Anita Mibey.

Community rewards woman with a political seat for her good work

BY AWC FEATURE SERVICE

The old adage that politics is a dirty game has made many women to avoid participating in political processes as voters, leave alone being active competitors in contests of this nature.

But for Anita Mibey, she was not going to allow such statements dampen her quest for political power in the 2022 general elections. Despite contesting in a field dominated by men and in an environment where culture and

social norms favoured men; she took a leap of faith and emerged as the only elected woman Member of County Assembly for Chemosot Ward seat in Bureti Sub County, and the only woman elected in all the political seats contested in Kericho County.

Her win, which she credits to the massive support she got from youth and women, was a demonstration of women's capabilities to flourish even in highly patriarchal communities and competitive political space. She demonstrated this by beating

18 other contesters, all male, to secure the United Democratic Alliance (UDA) party nominations.

"Frustrated by my win, the men ganged up against me and agreed to support one of them as an independent candidate to battle with me in the general elections. I still emerged the winner."

Mibey feels her close affinity to the community, understanding their needs, and defining interventions that spoke to what the electorate wanted, combined with her professional

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<<FROM PAGE 7 experience, made the path to her win less complicated.

“My long and illustrious career as a banker over a period of ten years and knowledge gained through my Masters Degree in Strategic Management, prepared me well for the tough contest.” Before joining politics, Mibey had worked as a branch manager at a finance institution in Voi and a senior manager at Asante Export Processing Zone in Kwale County.

But what set her apart from her competitors was her development record in the Ward. Her campaign and commitment to menstrual hygiene issues facing many young girls made her darling of many people.

“Initially, there was a challenge in menstrual hygiene products in my community and I wanted to become part of the solution. In 2017, I started an NGO and took a group of women to Uganda where they were trained on making reusable sanitary towels.

When they came back, we were able to get funding and buy sewing machines. We started to distribute reusable sanitary towels to the needy girls. To date, we have been able to reach about 50,000 girls with the reusable sanitary towels.”

This initiative, she says, changed her perspective to life and how to interact and assist people. The success of this project triggered her interest in other projects that responded to the needs of the community: conserving water springs at the community level.

“I mobilized funds from well-wishers and together we were able to do protection of water springs. If you come to my Ward, you will hear people saying we are going to fetch

Anita water. I wanted women and children to get clean water and this dream has now become a reality.”

The easy access to water points brought smiles to the faces of many women who started spending less time fetching water. Having made impressive strides in water and sanitary pads issues, her next focus was to assist farmers get value for their products.

As she linked farmers engaging in oil business with buyers abroad to improve their livelihoods; she reached out to Yusana, an organisation based in the United States, to help address the issue of food security in her Ward. The success of the project in her Ward has seen it replicated to other counties such as Kakamega, Narok, Bomet and Busia, and in the process, benefiting more than 100,000 families.

To spice it all, her women empowerment project such as the poultry farming initiatives, have benefited over 1,000 women, who now enjoy improved incomes.

The electorate that had keenly followed these initiatives reached out to her to vie for a leadership position. That is when she contested for the Chemosot Ward seat. “The community approached me and requested I vie for the seat, promising to give me full support. True their word, they elected her with a landslide, sending a strong message that communities are willing to vote women who her shown they have capabilities to turn around the fortunes of its people.

Challenging times

Mibey says realizing these successes has not been easy. “I have been abused and threatened as a woman politician. I also come

from a community where tradition dictates that politics is a preserve of men, and women are expected to take a back seat.”

Still, she takes this backlash in her stride. As a leader, she has learnt to be tolerant and realistic. “There are people who will support you and others will oppose you, but you must be resilient to overcome this challenge.”

Financial challenges have too made her journey sometimes very difficult. Mibey points out that lack of adequate financial resources has affected the impetus of implementing some of the projects she initiated in the Ward. Her disappointment is that while an MP has a development kitty, she is sometimes forced to use her own money to finance community projects.

With such financial challenges, Mibey is advising women aspiring for political seats to develop a support system within and outside their family framework. “My family is my greatest support system. Once you get into politics, your life becomes public and therefore you will need people who will support you in every way.”

Women aspiring for political positions should also, she adds, plan well, including how they intend to engage with the electorate to respond to their needs.

“Establish a small group of people you trust to work on your manifesto and campaign committee, which should reflect the face of your Ward or Constituency.” Mibey believes women have what it takes to lead in the political arena and calls for more women to contest for seats in Kericho County.

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Women bear the brunt of online violence



Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence a major threat to gender quality and woman empowerment.

BY FAITH MUIRURI

If there is one form of violence that is becoming a major issue for women, especially for those in leadership or in positions of influence, it is online violence. The perpetrators of this form of violence, many of the times faceless, use the online space to inflict psychological and emotion violence on their victims.

This violence comes in the form of cyber-harassment or intimidation, sending abusive, threatening or obscene emails with explicit threats of physical and/or sexual violence.

A recent snap shot survey

by African Woman and Child Feature Service on the online violence against women, especially during and after heated political competitions revealed that women are violated because of their political positions, interests, work, affiliations, or just their views on topical or societal issues.

“Perpetrators mainly targeted women politicians, women election officials, women supporters of a political candidate, women in media, or voters,” the report notes.

According to the report, the attacks on social media involved ridiculing, shaming, and use of other forms of psychological

violence. Women targeted received abusive emails or spams blog-posts, Tweets and other online communications.

In other cases, the violence entails deployment of manipulated videos and images to hoodwink people that the victim or woman is undertaking those acts, which are often regarded taboo or runs counter to a personality her supporters, affiliates or voters may want as their elected leader or holder of political office.

Perpetrators also used past videos that are online or those manipulated to show the woman candidate was not fit to run for a political position.

According to the report, the perpetrators either troll the victims, establish pseudo accounts, use memes, hashtags and Tiktok to afflict the women.

The report cites the case of Esther Passaris who posted a touching tribute to her father after he passed on. Twitter users trolled her mercilessly by focusing on her dress and her sexuality.

The report also singles out unflattering memes that were used extensively especially with pictures of women leaders where users created memes based on their looks and age. “Memes are often **PAGE>>10**

<<FROM PAGE 9 used as jokes and banter but in the case of politics they are used to ridicule these women. For Martha Karua, for instance, there was one particular meme that depicted her looking like a scare crow.”

According to the report, online violence has been aggravated by the faceless nature of social media, legal loopholes in which some forms of abuse are not properly defined, and lack of knowhow by victims on how to deal with digital violence.

The report at the same time points to abuse by people in different jurisdictions, for instance those in diaspora, who are not easy to reach and are only subject to laws in their countries of residence.

The report shows that out of the 22 online violence cases sampled, six were perpetrated by political opponents who used goons to physically attack women competitors.

Supporters of the political opponent accounted for 14 cases of reported online violence against women political leaders. “The supporters were mainly engaged in fueling propaganda against the female political leader.”

Netizens also referred to as internet citizens were responsible for 12 cases of violence against women leaders, many of whom perpetrated this violence just for the sake of abusing the women leader, most probably because of her gender.

Sadly, only 7% of the women who were violated online reported to the police, which is a very low number. The report established that the state was not doing much to protect women and girls from online violence.

To contain this form of violence, the report provides a raft of proposals. Key among them is training women and their associates on Digital Safety to empower women on how to use digital platforms without exposing themselves to violence.

Secondly, it will be important to directly engage with owners of social media platforms on how to bring down violent posts targeting women. “While this is naturally an area they work and have codified through their community standard, creating a rapport with them could help hasten the processes and reduce the spread of the violent messages. “

Thirdly, there is need to formulate a legal regime in the name of Online Safety Act to define a structured way of how to deal with online violence; acts of online violence, how to prevent it, and punishment for perpetrators of violence, among other things.

Other recommendations in the report are:

i) The state needs to create a Complaints Commission that will look into issues of online safety as well as developing a Code of Conduct prescribed to all online users.

(ii) Government and other actors need to undertake awareness campaigns to enlighten women on issues related to online violence; how to ensure safety while engaging on online spaces, and how to seek justice when they are violated online. Victims/survivors of online violence need to be encouraged to report their violators to the police to ensure the perpetrators are held to account.

iv) There is need to educate women on the procedures to follow when they want to report their violators to Facebook, Twitter, and other online platforms that are used as channels to violate them.

v) Conduct trainings to educate women on online media and the attendant violence on these spaces.

vii) Civil Society Organizations, Individuals and the government need to engage in advocacy campaigns against online violence that promote good hygiene on the online spaces.

viii) Victims/Survivors of online violence need to be capacitated with knowledge and skills on how to block or delete harmful comments on either Facebook or Twitter. This should be done as part of a strategy to deal with their violators.

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Beatrice Kerubo makes history as the first elected female MCA in Kisii



Beatrice Kerubo Makwae, Member of the County Assembly in Bombaba Borabu ward, Bomachoge Borabu Constituency, Kisii County.

BY AWC FEATURE SERVICE

When Beatrice Kerubo Makwae decided to vie for the Member of County Assembly position in the 2022 General Elections, many people in her community were sceptical of her winning the ultimate contest, leave alone the primaries. She had tried and lost in two elections, and going by that trend, the voters had written her off.

It was therefore a major surprise to many people and sweet success for her, when she won, becoming the first woman to win the seat and the only woman holding an

elective political position in Gusii land. Her win proved that tenacity pays off and that many women who have contested and failed to win in their previous attempts should never to give up.

“I am the first woman to be elected as a Member of the County Assembly in Bombaba Borabu ward, Bomachoge Borabu Constituency, Kisii County. This is after failing to clinch in my 2013 and 2017 attempts. But 2022 was my year.”

In her first attempt, she lost by only 50 votes when she vied on the little-known party, Restore and Build Kenya political party ticket.

Again, she lost on her second attempt, again, the political party that was very popularly in the region playing a role. But come 2022, the electorate focused more on the individual rather than the political party.

“Times are changing and we are seeing people win elections as independent candidates. During the 2022 General Election, I wanted to vie on the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party ticket; but the party gave a direct ticket to my opponent. At first I was disappointed because I did not want to vie as an independent candidate. I opted to remain in the party because it is still very hard to win an election in Kenya if you are not in the most popular political party.”

But unfortunate event opened doors for her. The person who was given the direct ticket was murdered in cold blood in a family dispute. “In a twist of event, ODM came looking for me. They submitted my name as their candidate.”

With this ticket, Kerubo trounced 13 competitors to win the seat. “I garnered 3,400 votes, the highest number ever cast in the ward to become the only woman elected in both Kisii and Nyamira counties.”

Kerubo, who is the current chair of the Environment Committee in the County Assembly, had previously worked as a clerk in the Assembly and an accountant at Kerongorori Secondary School.

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Innovative Strategies

But winning the seat did not just happen because she was on a popular political party. Her witty and innovative strategies played a major role in helping her win the position. First she had to develop messages and sell her development record to the electorate. This was informed by the many development projects she had initiated in the community. Her philanthropic work targeted people in the community helped her to win hearts, enhance her political profile.

Her personal attributes too helped in building this profile. Kerubo's ability to interact with everyone, regardless of their status, endeared her to many people. "I received support from everyone in my ward – men, women and the youth. I had teams of volunteers, mainly women and the youth, who traversed the ward mobilizing people to support my candidature."

When it came to her campaigns, her strategies proved superior to her competitors. "I went to each polling station and would nominate 20 people. I told them to mobilise people to vote for me. I also had an advisory committee with representation from every polling station who advised me on what to do." This strategy ensured every community felt a sense of belonging with her.

The committee used Kerubo's manifesto to sell her agenda in every corner of the Ward. It spelt out her plans to empower women, the youth, and people living with disability. The manifesto also spoke to how she was going to improve school infrastructure, roads, and address the rampant water problem in the Ward.

To ensure clarity and impact in her delivery, Kerubo engaged in a door-to-door campaigns beginning from 5:00 am every day and ending before dusk. This enabled her to reach many people and popularise her candidature. She also used platforms and forums organized by other people such as the candidate contesting for the governorship position, to popularise her candidature.

Her strategy to work with other actors such as the church also paid off. The overwhelming support she received from them not only helped to enhance her chances of winning; but also reduced incidences of humiliation from her opponents. "I am Deaconess and a treasurer of the SDA church, which unanimously endorsed my candidature in all church gatherings."

Challenging times

Even as she enjoyed this support of the church and political actors, Makwae had her share of challenges. The death of her husband in 2020 became a source of attacks on her character by her opponents, who told voters not vote a widow, who was to remarry to remarry immediately after winning the elections.

"They also looked for a man in the ward and urged him to marry me. My opponents spread unfounded propaganda and rumours about me, organising people to heckle me whenever I addressed a public gathering. It was very disappointing but I chose to soldier on."

Her financial challenges were made less painful by her supporters who donated to her campaign kitty, while ODM's policy to charge female aspirants half of the fee for party candidates made the deal even sweeter.

Learning from difficult situations

Her experiences with difficult political issues helped her gain useful insights into political issues. She realised that it was important for a political leader address issues and portray an image that resonate with the people. She had to package herself as a mother, with majority of the people, including the youth, fondly calling her 'Madhe', a slang for mother.

"When you walk your journey with your people, you are safe. If you abandon them, and only appear when the elections are about to happen, you are in trouble. I am always in touch with my people, to ensure there is no time they will say I am missing in action."

She says even will all these attributes, one of the greatest challenges women faces is lack of support from political parties. "Political party tickets are important, as it is difficult to sail through as an independent candidate. For any serious contender, being in a political party candidate propels you."

"Most women lose election at the nomination level due to dishonest acts in the political parties. This can change with adequate sensitisation. Women candidates also need to know early enough if the political party is going to be supportive of their candidature so that they avoid unpleasant situation when the voting date is near."

But more importantly, she says, the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) need to engage in intense voter education to help voters not to be wood winked by selfish politicians.

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Teenage pregnancy a worrying development in Kenya. PICTURE COURTESY OF UNFPA

Media fails to link women reproductive health challenges to key development issues

BY AWC FEATURE
CORRESPONDENT

Jane* (not her real name) struggles to nurse her eight-month-old baby in her dimly lit and small Mabati structure in Mathare slums.

This is not Jane's usual life. Things changed for the worst following the floods that hit Mathare informal settlements several months ago, killings several people and leaving hundreds in a desolate state. Many like Jane, lost almost all their life treasures.

She only got some reprieve when a community-based organisation gave her and other internally displaced persons shelter for a number of weeks to give them

time to recollect their lives.

"This is the best house I can afford, because I do menial jobs to take care of my baby as well," she says.

Jane is one of the many young mothers in Mathare slums who have babies out of unplanned pregnancies. The baby she is holding was unplanned because of difficulties in getting contraceptives that would have helped her to prevent it in the first place. Young women in this part of the world say their biggest struggle is getting the important family planning support or when you get it, the quality is always wanting.

"Accessing contraceptives as a young girl is quite difficult here in

Mathare slums. The nurses are rude and accuse us of consuming more contraceptives at the expense of older mothers, who according to them, are more deserving," she says.

"This made me go to a private clinic for some pills. But as it turns out, the clinic sold me expired pills which were ineffective, and I ended up getting pregnant."

Rachael Mwikali, an activist in Mathare, says many of these girls who give birth are unable to secure proper jobs because they have no money to hire nannies or afford day-care.

The sad news is that while this problem gets a lot of coverage and visibility in the media, actions to remedy the situation **PAGE>>14**

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remains an issue.

A report by the Kenya Human Rights Commission says teenage pregnancies were the most covered sexual reproductive health stories by the media in 2023 and 2024. They led with 209 stories being coverage, followed by Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) at 154, and abortion related stories at 154.

The report, compiled between October, 2023 and June, 2024, said Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) stories were mostly highlighted in the print media, with the Standard newspaper leading followed by the Star and then the Daily Nation.

The gap however was the depth of the stories that were published by these various media houses.

“Kenya’s media, from print to broadcast, is frequently filled with stories of rape, incest, and abortion, yet these narratives often fail to connect to the broader issues of justice, healthcare, or policy interventions,” says the report.

“Such gaps in coverage leave critical SRHR violations to be covered with sensational headlines without addressing the systemic failures that impact young girls and women of reproductive age. The report aims to provide actionable insights for journalists, policymakers, and civil society on improving the quality and depth of SRHR reporting.”

To improve quality and depth of coverage, the report recommends use of personal and emotional narratives as one of the frames journalists can use to tell impactful stories.

“This frame emphasises and

humanises SRHR issues by sharing personal stories of suffering, advocating for safe reproductive health options and discussing positive and negative aspects of SRHR within the community,” the report says.

It further seeks to provoke action and raise awareness about the real-life consequences of various SRHR practices. The report identified 2.1 percent of the total coverage from this frame.

Kenya has more than 500 radio and TV stations serving various segments of society, a growth accelerated by the transition to digital terrestrial television in 2015, a report by the Media Council of Kenya 2024 says.

Furthermore, the country enjoys one of the highest internet penetration rates in Africa, driven by the widespread use of mobile phones. Hence access to information is easier. The problem is the quality that information.

“Print media led in covering SRHR stories because of the security victims and news sources have with them. Unlike broadcast journalists who show up with big cameras and recorders, which could be intimidating, print journalists only have a pen and a paper, hence the comfort,” said Gordon Osen, a print journalist and also a panellist at the launch of the report.

According to the report, Homa Bay county had the highest coverage of teenage pregnancies followed by Kakamega and Nairobi counties. Nairobi, however had the highest mention of sexual education stories (30) due to the high media presence.

“The data suggests that urban areas like Nairobi and Mombasa are more active in addressing diverse human rights issues, possibly due to higher media presence, media personnel, and advocacy efforts. For instance, Nairobi leads with a total of 30 mentions, prominently addressing CSE, abortion, and teenage pregnancies,” the report observes.

The report recommends that Garissa, Kwale and Trans-Nzoia regions get more coverage, suggesting potential underreporting or less focus on these critical SRHR issues.

The report further noted a spike in coverage of SRHR issues during international events such as the ongoing 16 days of activism.

“This is because more lobby groups are coming out and are empowering journalists with grants, information and reports on SRHR issues,” Faith Oneya, a panellist at the launch said. “But this is a good thing, because many journalists and media houses are struggling with funds. So imagine if this kind of partnership happened the whole year.”

Participants felt that political leaders and government officials, legal and judicial bodies, health professionals and educators, who are regarded as key shapers of the SRHR narrative, need to do more to reverse the current high-rate of unplanned pregnancies. These stakeholders in turn, impact public debates, awareness and understanding while influencing the implementation of SRHR laws and educational programmes, the report notes.

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Asha Mohamed Hassan.

How Asha is helping shape women leadership Samburu

BY HENIX OBUCHUNJU

In the dusty and forlorn Samburu County, where patriarchy reins and culture frowns at women leadership, especially in the political space, one woman has dared to venture into politics.

Although born and raised in a community where women are expected to be homemakers, Asha Mohamed Hassan is proving that women too can flourish in the male-dominated world of politics.

Her interest in politics and leadership begun more than two decades ago as she watched her, father, a former politician in

Marsabit county, flourish in that space. Growing up, Asha keenly followed her father's political journey and, in the process, took great interest in politics as a career.

"Raised by a politician, I saw everything my dad did, his sacrifices, and his commitment to the community. It motivated me to follow in his footsteps," says Asha.

But it was not until 2013 when Asha decided to be actively engaged in politics and leadership in Samburu County.

"When I first ventured into politics, I knew it would not be easy; but I was determined to learn from the mistakes of other

politicians and flourish where they failed."

Still, many in her community felt she was getting into a territory that was not for women, and hence gave her little support. "Every time I speak out on key political and governance issues, I feel the weight of tradition against me," Asha bemoans. "But I know my voice is important, and I will continue using it."

True to her determination, Asha contested for the Member of County Assembly (MCA) position for Shabaab Ward during the 2022 general elections. Unfortunately, she lost in the primaries.

That defeat did not kill her spirits, but renewed her determination and hope of flourishing in the political space.

"I believe defeat is not the end; it's an opportunity to grow stronger. I believe women can and should lead."

A determined Asha says she is priming herself for the 2027 general elections, vowing to continue fighting for women's representation and rights. "My goal is to inspire others to join me in this journey."

Asha believes the investments she has made in the community and the visibility she has gained over the years, will pay off come 2027. One of her most notable contributions in the community is supporting women's groups in Maralal by linking them to organizations that offer empowerment programs.

"Helping women achieve financial independence is very important for me. I provide connections and financial support to these women groups, ensuring they are able to implement projects that enable them to grow and sustain their livelihoods."

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<<FROM PAGE 15 In addition to women, she has been aggressively advocating for youth empowerment. In Maralal town, she supports youth groups engaged in sports by funding their transport and meals whenever they are participating in various competitions.

She notes that young people are the heartbeat of the community, and supporting them in sports and other areas is part of her agenda. It is because of this engagement that many young people in her community see her as a dependable leader and a role model.

Her focus has been helping girls to enjoy dignity during their menstrual period, especially in a county where high poverty level makes sanitary pads a luxury. To support these girls, Asha has been distributing free sanitary pads, which has allowed the girls to attend school with dignity and confidence.

"Girls should not have to choose between their education and basic needs. This initiative has helped reduce school absenteeism and demonstrates my commitment to fostering education as a pathway to women empowerment.

She has taken the sanitary pads support further by paying school fees of four girls in Samburu County and giving shelter to other two vulnerable ones, who she has offered a safe space and the support they need to thrive in life.

Her agenda for the women in the in Shabaa Ward, situated in Maralal town, is to influence the creation of a conducive environment that will allow them to flourish. She plans to contribute to this by giving information about economic and political opportunities.

"Women should not depend on their husbands for everything.

They need to be aware of the market opportunities available and be equipped to take advantage of them," says Asha.

But this empowerment cannot happen with many obstacles, including cultural practices, stand in their way. That is why one of Asha's agenda is to combat harmful cultural practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which has derailed the empowerment of women in Samburu county.

"We must rid our community of traditions that harm our girls. Change starts with awareness and courageous action."

For now, Asha is proud of the progress she has made so far.

"I am satisfied that I use my voice, no matter how small it may seem, to advance women's issues in Maralal." Her efforts to mentor young girls, advocate for equality, and challenge outdated norms have not gone unnoticed. Women and the youth are appreciating her work.

Through her engagement with them, she has also learnt useful lessons. "I have learned that it takes courage and resilience for a woman to make it through politics in Maralal. The path is not easy, but courage and not giving up have kept me going."

Another lesson she has learnt is the critical importance of a support system that each woman in politics needs to have. Asha says her support system plays an essential role in her political journey. She credits her husband for being her pillar of strength.

"Campaigns can be grueling, especially when meetings extend into the late hours. Having a husband who understands and supports my ambitions makes all the difference."

Her husband often picks her up after these late meetings, ensuring her safety and giving her the assurance that she is not alone in her quest to improve the wellbeing of her people.

Besides her family, she collaborates with other women leaders in Samburu County to amplify their collective voice.

Together, they have formed a network that meets regularly to exchange ideas and strategies for tackling gender inequality and increasing female representation in decision making spaces. This has also emerged as another vital support system.

"When we come together, we empower one another and build a stronger foundation for change."

One of the women leaders who continue to inspire her is former Samburu Women Representative Hon. Maison Leshomo, whom she considers her role model.

"I look up to Hon. Leshomo. Her achievements remind me that women can lead and bring about positive change."

As she looks to the future, Asha is hopeful that Samburu County is going to emerge as one where women not only participate in politics but are recognized as effective and influential leaders.

"I believe in a future where women lead from the front, not just the sidelines," she says. She is doing this with every campaign, speech, and community project, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable Samburu.

For Asha, politics is more than a career; it is a calling to serve, inspire, and lead her community toward a brighter and more equitable future.

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