

SautiSasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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UN WOMEN



**WHEN WILL THEY EXHALE:
Struggles of Kenyan
women political leaders**



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Mixed fortunes for gender equality in Kenya



Voters queuing to vote during the 2022 general elections.

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Close to three decades since agitation for equal representation of women in the political leadership processes picked momentum; women and gender equality advocates are yet to exhale.

The representation of women in Kenya's political arena has been marked by slow progress with successive elections failing to help the county to attain fair representation of women.

A review by the UN Women of the 2022 elections revealed that women candidates only accounted for a paltry 11 per cent of all candidates gazetted by the Independent Electoral and

Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to contest in these elections.

Similar findings are captured in an audit conducted by Centre for Multi-party Democracy (CMD) that assessed the level of inclusion during the 2022 elections. According to the audit, only 225 women candidates contested for the National Assembly seat.

The story of low representation of women in Parliament is as old as the independence of Kenya.

In 1969, women representation in Parliament stood at 0.6 per cent with only one member out of 158 seats being a woman. This increased to four women Members of Parliament or 2.5 per cent in 1974, and to five or 3.1 per cent in 1979.

But it decreased to two women MPs or 1.2 per cent in 1983 and 1988 elections. In the 1992 multiparty elections, the number of women representatives increased to six or 3.2% out of 188 members. However, in 1997, it decreased again to four women Members of Parliament out of 210, translating to 1.9 per cent women representation

These numbers have been slowly but painfully improving. In 2002, there were nine women Members of Parliament out of 210, translating to 4.3 per cent women representation.

It then increased to 15 (7.1%) out of 210 in 2007, to 16 (5.5%) out of 290 in 2013, then 23 (7.9%) out of 290 in 2017, and 29 (10%) out of 290 in 2022.

Only the governor's seat has registered remarkable change in women representation, from none being elected as governor in 2013, to three (6.3%) in 2017, and seven (14.9%) in 2022. The female deputy governors increased from no woman deputy governor in 2013, to seven in 2017, and eight in 2022.

In the Senate, the number of women elected representatives increased from none in 2013, to three (6.4%) in 2017 and then stagnated at 6.4% in 2022. In the county assemblies, women representation increased from 82 (5.7% in 2013, to 97 (6.7%) in 2017, and to 100 (6.9%) in 2022.

PAGE>>4

<<FROM PAGE 3 According to Franklin Mukwanja, CMD's Chief Executive Officer, Kenya's electoral system only allows the moneyed to dominate the political processes. "If you look at the profile of people who can do well in Kenyan politics; they only pass for the rich old men because they are the only ones who can be able to mobilise the financial resources required to whip up communities behind them. The electoral system gives them an edge to influence things because they have the dominance and money."

Mukwanja argues that the current electoral system has failed to institutionalise political parties and instead served to increase the culture of ethnicity. The latter allows domineering personalities to take advantage of the system and continually destroy the country's democracy.

"We may argue that we continue incrementally to achieve the two-thirds gender rule. But doing so is setting ourselves for failure. However, if we tinkered with our electoral design and brought in the mixed member proportional representation; we may not be talking about the two-thirds gender rule. But a 50-50 opportunity and a good mix in terms of social inclusion."

Dr Karatu Kiemo of the University of Nairobi concurs, and cites the lack of internal democracy in political parties as a major obstacle to increased women representation in politics.

According to Kiemo, the 2022 elections was marred by several cases where many women candidates were being asked

to set aside their candidacy and support their male counterparts.

Registrar of Political Parties Ann Nderitu says there is still struggle to get women in political space even where clear policies and laws exist. For instance, she notes, most political parties submitted to IEBC lists of nominated candidates that were not compliant with the two-thirds gender rule. "We need to prioritise the two-thirds gender rule as an electoral reform agenda."

Pamela Ateka, who contested and lost the Nairobi senatorial seat on a Democratic Action Party of Kenya (DAP-K) ticket, concurs. She says political parties have contributed to the marginalisation of women by failing to ensure inclusion and prioritisation of women in party lists. They are also to blame for coercing female candidates to step down to pave the way for male counterparts.

And if they were not coerced to step down, a good number of female candidates missed getting party tickets even where they had won, according to Prof Phylis Bartoo, the MP for Moiben constituency. "Most party officials used delaying tactics to favour male candidates and discourage female aspirants."

"Most women had to either be subjected to repeat elections or the political party tribunal to recapture stolen party tickets."

Janet Sitienei, the MP Turbo Constituency, adds that gender discrimination was also an inhibiting factor. "When I first vied for the seat during the 2013 elections, most people felt I should have vied for the women's representative position, and not the single member constituency

seat.

"Socialisation and stereotypes still influence voter thinking because some of them strongly feel the governor, the MP and the senator's seats belong to the men; while women should compete for the women rep seat."

Malyun Farah, who vied and lost the Lagdera seat on a United Democratic Movement (UDM) party ticket, notes that barriers such as low literacy levels, discriminatory laws around land ownership and inheritance, further restrict women from becoming leaders or voting in election.

"In some areas, women are not allowed to vote, with voting being left for the head of the family. In some cases, women are forced into voting for particular candidates."

Farah argues that the patriarchal nature of Kenyan politics has contributed largely to the exclusion of women who decide to contest even as independent candidates. Women who take this route are faced with intense violence during campaigns, stolen ballot papers, insults, sexual harassment, and cyber bullying

"Women face all forms of violence including gender violence during elections as well as negative social perceptions that men make for better leaders than women."

The good news is that "people are warming up for women leadership," says Bartoo, "with many believing that their resources are safer in the hands of women and therefore the need to support them to take up these leadership positions."

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The power of mentorship in women political participation

BY AWC FEATURE SERVICE

At the age of 28, Anita had made up her mind that she wanted to be a politician. Without much political experience, she decided to contest for the Member of County Assembly seat in the 2022 elections.

But the reality of competitive politics hit her when she started her campaign journey. She encountered a lot of challenges ranging from lack of financial and human resources, culture, to online violence. But one challenge proved too much to bear; lack of knowledge on how politics work and how to manoeuvre the political intrigues that confronted her. She did not have someone to turn to for advice on how to navigate such competitive political space.

Anita is not alone. Hundreds of women who desire to get into leadership lack people to hold and mentor them. In recent years, mentorship is emerging as one of the strategic approaches to enhancing the capacities of women to excel in political leadership.

Besides social, cultural and economic barriers, lack of access to expert advice, support and guidance from fellow

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Elizabeth Adundo, the Head of Secretariat at the ODM Women's League.



Beatrice Elachi, current member of parliament for Dagoretti North constituency.

<<FROM PAGE 5 women leaders is another factor affecting women performance in politics.

A cross section of women political leaders interviewed by African Woman and Child Feature Service indicated that were it not for the mentorship they received from senior women politicians or institutions that advance women leadership; they would not have joined politics or excelled in their current political positions.

The positive impact of this approach has led to political parties and women's rights organisations developing mentorship programmes that are designed to increase the participation and inclusion of women in political leadership.

One such initiative is being implemented by Orange

Democratic Movement (ODM) Women's League. The Women's League has been recruiting young women from institutions of higher learning interested in advancing their political careers.

Through this programme, many young women are realising their dreams of becoming politicians and ascending to decision-making positions.

Mary Adhiambo, a Business Management student at Mount Kenya University, acknowledges that the mentorship programme works. After going through the programme for three years, she says, she is now able to seize opportunities in the political space; something she would not have done before the mentorship.

"Having been recruited as a young captain. I have walked the journey of understanding politics and gained experience by interacting directly with male and female politicians.

During the 2022 electioneering period, I got an opportunity to work at the ODM Secretariat for six months," says 23-year-old Adhiambo. This exposure has made a huge difference to her political perspectives and engagement, she says.

For her, the trainings she obtained during the mentorship programme have sharpened her skills; while networking with politicians has also opened doors for her to work for them especially on their social media platforms. She also assists them in the mobilisation of stakeholders for important meetings.

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<<FROM PAGE 6 “My political career is slowly taking shape,” says Adhiambo. “Being in this political space has helped me to differentiate between rhetoric and reality when it comes to politics. When time comes for me to vie for a political position, I will know where to start.”

Elizabeth Adundo, the Head of Secretariat at the ODM Women’s League, concurs. She notes that the mentorship programme has contributed to an increased number of women leaders of all ages in the political spaces.

“Although the Women’s League was established in 2005, we have managed to bring on-board young women from learning institutions. This noble initiative saw three of the mentees vie for political seats as Members of County Assemblies in the 2022 elections,” says Adundo.

The mentorship programme started in 2021 with only six members. By the end of 2023, the number had risen to over 2,000 young women from public and private universities participating in the programme.

The process of recruiting young women interested in politics, also known as “young captains”, from public and private institutions of higher learning, is done every year.

According to Adundo, the support they are receiving



We make sure that our mentees from needy families benefit from bursaries provided by county governments to enable them continue with their education.

ELIZABETH ADUNDO, THE HEAD OF SECRETARIAT AT THE ODM WOMEN’S LEAGUE



from ODM and donors towards supporting the mentorship programme has seen the mentees receive training in communication, advocacy and networking in the political spaces.

Some of these mentees have been given jobs by politicians or work within the county government.

Those who qualify to be mentees must be young women and have interest in politics, and should ensure all the time while in the programme they exhibit loyalty, fidelity and faithfulness to the party.

“We make sure that our mentees from needy families benefit from bursaries provided by county governments to enable them continue with their education. We also help those that complete their education to find employment

within the counties,” notes Adundo.

She adds that ODM is working on a strategy that will see the mentorship programmes taken to the county level. They have already mapped out five pioneer counties: Nairobi, Homa Bay, Kisumu, Kakamega and Mombasa.

Despite these successes, the mentorship programme has had its share of challenges. They include cultural barriers that hinder young women from joining politics: “When we take young girls to political activities in the counties, we are accused of exposing them to men and turning them into prostitutes,” bemoans Adundo.

The other challenge is limited human and financial resources. “We must work with donors, which sometimes is difficult because they come with their own conditions.”

Recruitment of the mentees by other political parties after ODM has invested in mentoring them is another challenge, notes Adundo.

“We lost some of our mentees during the last elections due to poaching by other political parties to join their campaign teams.”

Adundo says they are focused on the 2027 elections where they expect to field many young women mentees in various political positions.

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Fatuma Achani, the Governor of Kwale County.

Women politicians demand stringent laws to curb online violence

BY AWC FEATURE SERVICE

The 2022 elections may have passed, but the many challenges it posed to women candidates still linger to date. One such challenge that make women leaders shudder is the massive online violence they experienced.

Every woman leader who was perceived to be a strong competitor, or had the ability to destabilise the political status quo or patriarchy, had a share of this violence.

Fatuma Achani, the Governor of Kwale County, is one such woman leader. She was abused, trolled and stalked on different social media platforms by her opponents.

“One day I went to social media and found my son trending with people ostensibly looking for his father. I was devastated because I could not believe that people were going to stoop this low for political reasons.”

Although she fought the propaganda and won the elections, she says that this was the lowest point anyone could go to garner political mileage.

Achani says she refused to be intimidated with such brazen attack and disinformation about her character. “I woke up motivated and I had to show them even if they bring me down, they cannot kill my zeal win.”

For Phylis Bartoo, the MP for Moiben, the violence on social media started when she announced her bid for the seat.

“Initially, we were quite a number and everybody wanted to be territorial. Psychologically, I knew I was entering into someone else’s territory; and therefore, I was never perturbed when **PAGE>>9**



<<FROM PAGE 8 they turned to social media with all manner of lies.”

She was abused online, with supporters of her competitor calling her an outsider who could not be entrusted with any leadership position. They tried to use crafty ways to link her to corruption.

“I was a lecturer at Egerton University and there was a report accusing the vice chancellor of embezzlement of funds. They removed the name of the vice chancellor and replaced it with mine. They then circulated the report widely. Anybody reading it knew I was facing serious allegations of corruption.”

The keyboard warriors also alleged she was in her fifth marriage, and was known for getting married and then divorcing. “These messages were circulated through targeted WhatsApp and Facebook groups.”

Proponents of this violence then shifted from online space to offline spaces, where they used political rallies to amplify the lies.

When she trounced her competitors in the primaries, the opponents said she had been denied the party ticket because she was a stranger.

“At first people believed it. I was confronted by supporters who included old women and men asking if what was being said was true. I had to take a photo of myself holding the UDA certificate as proof of my win.”

Bartoo says that if the elections were held at the height of such

misinformation, it would have cost her the victory. “But a white lie has a dead end. If you have time, move fast to clarify the claims. Let the truth come out before the lies destroys you.”

Anita Mibey, the Member of County Assembly (MCA) for Chemosot ward, was not spared online violence either. Her opponents almost messed her up at the last minute when they coined lies about her father.

“I come from Chepalungu but I am married in Bureti Sub County where I was vying for an elective seat. They used someone from my village to lie that he was my father and that he had come to take me back to the man I was married to, and my four children that I had abandoned.”

A week before the elections, videos of the alleged father speaking about his daughter circulated on all major social media platforms.

“I was accosted with questions in every event I went to with people asking me to explain why my father had come for me. I had difficult time trying to convince people that the person in the video was not my father. It was someone being used by my opponents to taint my image.”

At one point she called her mother who was also vying for an MCA seat in Chepalungu. “I sent her the video and asked her who this man was because he sounded like someone who knew me. My mum later told me that the man claiming to be my father was a blogger in Chepalungu who was known for conning politicians.”

When she knew who she was dealing with, Mibey engaged her “bloggers to counter the information. They managed to salvage her image.

The stories of these women leaders indicate the urgent need to put in place policy and legal measures to protect women from online violence; and make the online space safe.

“We need to put in place laws that curb this violence. We need to make it a punishable crime just like any other crime so that people do not misuse it.”

Her advice to women facing online violence is that “report it to the police and take it like any other violence.”

While Kenya does not have a specific law addressing online safety for women, it has an array of laws and policies that speak to online violence against women and girls.

According to Mercy Cheruiyot from the Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), these laws include: The Kenya Information and Communications Act 2013; Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018, Section 14-46; the Mutual Legal Assistance Act; and the Data Protection Act No. 24 of 2019 and General Regulations 2021.

Cheruiyot however warns that there are loopholes in the law that need to be addressed. These include: less punitive penalties for offenders; there is minimal use of Mutual legal assistance provisions; and witness protection agencies.

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EGBV: Threat to women's success in politics

BY TERRY AYUKO

If there is one thing women participating in political processes fear most; it is weaponisation of violence. This is being achieved through falsifications and misinformation about women candidates perceived to be strong.

This violence differs from one woman to another depending on their class, ethnicity, and profession.

A report by Fida-Kenya on Electoral Gender Based Violence (EGBV) reveals that there were unprecedented levels of violence against female politicians during the 2022 elections.

Women political candidates were assaulted and subjected to intimidation, cyber bullying and hate speech.

A case in point is where a female candidate aspiring for the Member of the County Assembly seat on a United Democratic Alliance (UDA) ticket, was violated during a Kenya Kwanza rally at Kamiigua Youth Polytechnic on June 20, 2022.

"A militia group hired by her opponents forcibly ejected her from the meeting even before it had officially begun," notes the report.

Of the spaces where the violence was perpetrated, the report cites

online meetings as the most common venue for electoral gender-based violence. It is here where cyber bullying was ranked the highest form of violence.

The report blames these on the fact that online platforms tend to instill confidence in offenders due to the lower chances of being caught.

"The most common form of abuse was cyber bullying mostly reported on Facebook and Twitter platforms."

The majority of the candidates reported cases where false and misleading information about them was disseminated through unofficial or pseudonymous accounts.

For instance, on the Mangwai ya Ghetto Facebook page, a photo of M.K and W.N was posted with the caption "ciugo igiri gwi shosh wa githumo na kimenyi wa jeshi," which translates as "two words to the Kisumu grandmother and armies all-knowing one."

Another comment was "nimathii nakuu makariithie nguku riu," which translates as "the two should go and do chicken rearing now." Such cases of cyber bullying were registered more in Siaya, Kisii and Nairobi counties.

Other forums where women were violated included social gatherings such as funerals and community

events. "Political rallies, however accounted for only 15 per cent of the cases, with verbal and hate speech being the most common at these events," the Fida-Kenya report notes.

"In Meru County, an aspirant for the women representative seat had to endure uncomfortable questions about her leadership skills that centred on her marital status. The candidate was divorced, and her 'inability to maintain her home' was listed as a form of inadequacy as a woman leader. The idea is that if she can't keep her home together, how can she be trusted to lead?"

According to the findings, Nairobi County had the highest rate of electoral related sexual assault while Kitui County had the highest number of reported cases of sexual harassment.

Further, Nairobi recorded the highest number of cases where organised crime was reported at political rallies; while sexual assault was highest in gatherings such as fundraisers and other meetings of political nature.

The report concludes that EGBV cases demonstrate that this form of violence directed at women in political rallies and online platforms is one of the major barriers to women realising their political rights.

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Elections: A bumpy affair for women politicians



Aisha Said during a rally in Makina Ward in 2022.

BY HENIX OBUCHUNJU

When Rosemary Masitsa decided to vie as a Member of County Assembly (MCA) in Makina Ward, Kibra constituency, in the 2022 elections, she did not think she would have such a bumpy ride.

Abuses from competitors, lack of respect from some voters, and calls for her to step down in favour of male candidates, are just a few of the painful experiences she endured.

For her, this was different from the 2007, 2013, and

2017 elections that she had participated in as a candidate.

According to Masitsa, although she won the 2013 Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party ticket primaries, her competitor was declared the winner. "I did not give up and in 2017; I again competed in the elections." Unfortunately, she lost.

Come 2022, Masitsa says she had mastered the political terrain and was certain of a win.

As the election date neared, she recalls, she had done her assignment well. The competition had narrowed between her and Aisha Said

Ibrahim, a 26-year-old Kenyatta University graduate.

As predicted by polls, Aisha came in second with approximately 3,000 votes, while Masitsa emerged victorious with around 8,000 votes.

Her tenacity and resilience finally paid off. Now, Masitsa looks at her win with a lot of hope and happiness. She wants more women to come out and go for leadership positions.

Story of a young female politician

Aisha, who came in second in that race, has a story to tell, too.

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<<FROM PAGE 11 She says being young made some voters see her as weak, with her unmarried status further complicating matters for her.

“I remember one day while campaigning, male voters asked me whether I had a child. Upon telling them that I had no child, one of them asked me how I expected to lead when I had not given birth,” says Aisha, remembering this as one of her lowest moments in her political journey.

She also recalls how she could go to some meetings and voters, especially men, would tell her not to waste her time in politics but get married to them.

“This, among other challenges like inadequate finances to give handouts to voters while campaigning, portrayed me as a weak candidate,” she says.

The Nubian queen, as she is popularly referred to by many in Makina Ward, says she became fearful and walked with hordes of men while conducting door-to-door campaigns at night.

“Yes, I am a lady, and this is a space where men are perceived to be dominant. I had to take extra precautions,” adds Aisha, who holds a degree in gender and development. Though costly, she had to live with such a security arrangement.

Aisha’s story is a testimony of why there is need to put in place legal and policy interventions to increase the



Director of Programs and Research at the National Gender and Equality Commission, Paul Kuria at a past event.

participation and inclusion of women in political leadership.

Role of political parties

Paul Kuria, the Director of Programmes and Research at the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), notes that more women could be elected to political positions if the playing field was leveled.

He says the weaponisation of violence against women during elections is a form of discrimination against women, which discourages them from participating in politics.

“We are happy that there are various women and men leaders who have come out to stop violence against women in politics,” says Kuria, insisting that “political parties must end the menace by putting in place severe sanctions against perpetrators of such crimes.”

Kuria believes that the most important thing is for political parties to have their codes of conduct strictly adhered to, to prevent violence against women politicians from recurring.

The menace that is online violence

One such violence is online violence, which is emerging as a concern for many women politicians who are now afraid to use digital platforms to campaign. A female politician who spoke anonymously revealed that she barely uses her social media accounts and has left it to her handlers to interact with the audiences.

“I feel the terrain on social media is even murkier, and I am just careful not to cross paths with anyone,” she says.

The United Nations **PAGE>>13**



Makina Ward MCA Rosemary Masitsa.

<<FROM PAGE 12 Human Rights Council defines Online Violence against Women (OVAW) as a form of gender-based violence that utilises information and communication technology to perpetrate acts of violence against women.

A study conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) on online violence against women in Kenya during the 2022 elections had 27 respondents complaining of experiencing various online attacks. This ranged from online bullying, insults and name-calling, threats against their campaign and personal lives

and their families, to negative criticism, and harassment from their political parties.

“Some went as far as spreading fake news. This included rumours of corruption or infidelity to undermine women on the campaign trail. Others spoke of misinformation about them and their families,” notes the report

Judy Kariakor, a Programme Officer at the International Research and Exchanges Board (Irex), affirms that online violence targeting female politicians is on the rise and efforts to tame it should be

speeded-up.

Kariakor notes that technology has been weaponised, with all the gains made lost.

Lack of adequate finances for women politicians

This is compounded by other challenges, including funding difficulties. Prof Karuti Kanyinga from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Nairobi says female politicians face unique challenges owing to their gender, and expecting them to compete fairly with their male counterparts is nearly impossible.

“Women politicians spend more money campaigning because they have to, for instance, hire more security to protect them from any harassment,” says Prof Karuti, adding that most campaigns take place at night, which most women are unable to participate in.

This is because at that time they are either attending to their families or they are just afraid of attacks from opponents.

“Our policies and laws are not respectful to women,” says Prof Kanyinga. He argues that women will continue to be unfairly treated as long as the drafters and implementers of Kenyan laws continue to be men, who, according to him, are patriarchal.

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Elizabeth Lokolio, founder Silo Agrovet.

Success in business is about leadership and taking risks, says Lokolio

BY AWC FEATURE SERVICE

When Elizabeth Lokolio's name is mentioned in Turkana; it draws admiration from men and women. Such an approval is for a reason: she is one of the few women entrepreneurs in the region.

Her success is an inspiration to many women who are already doing something or are planning to start an income generating venture.

Lokolio's journey in business began in 2009. By then, she was employed as a Programme

officer at Turkana Pastoralists Development Organisation (TUPADO). Her brief was to train community animal health workers on how to tend their livestock. But even as she did this, her passion was to do much more than just train these farmers.

So about 15 years ago, she quit her job and with her personal savings of Sh150,000, she started the Silo Agrovet, a shop for selling and providing services to livestock farmers in Lodwar town and beyond. "I wanted to be a vet on call," she says.

But things were not easy. She ventured into this business at

the height of market depression occasioned by a government policy that allowed farmers access to free drugs and vaccination.

"This meant that very few people were willing to buy from my shop." She did not give up.

To get farmers to see value in buying her products than relying solely on free goods from the government, she started going after the farmers, meeting them in their spaces, especially at water points or grazing fields. She used this opportunity to educate them on the need to routinely vaccinate their livestock against major diseases without

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<<FROM PAGE 14 waiting for free government interventions, which in most cases, came late in the day.

Besides the visits, she took part in educative radio programmes where people were able to ask her questions on business leadership. This platform and her visits to farmers raised her profile as a leader in business. "This set me on the path to success and I became instrumental in providing information on animal health and production."

Her aggressiveness started to pay off. In just a few months after opening her business, the County Government of Turkana gave her first tender of Sh250,000 to supply farmers with free drugs. "I bagged Sh50,000 in profit as result of this tender," says an elated Lokolio.

Her journey to greatness had just begun. Before long, the praises by farmers about her work won her yet another tender from the county government.

"I went to a livestock provider workshop where the county CEC and the chief officer had been invited. We told them we have capacity to handle farmers' needs. After listening to us, the county officers agreed to give us tenders, which they said would be distributed fairly among veterinarians.

By the time this decision was being taken, Lokolio was the only veterinarian with a registered company. This turned out to be a huge advantage for her.

When companies were asked to bid, she did. Again, her Silo Agrovets Company was awarded technical tenders valued at



Sh35.2 million by Turkana County Government. At this point Lokolio knew she had made the right decision to quit her job.

As the business expanded, she continued to win tenders from various organisations. By the time of this interview, her business portfolio was worth millions of shillings.

This huge success has enabled her to register two other companies namely: Lokwarimoe Builders and Construction Company, and Kalimax General Supplies.

But what many women in her community and beyond would want to know is what inspired her to start the business. For Lokolio, she saw an opportunity in the market while serving as a programme officer at TUPADO.

"I used to train community animal health workers who would receive drug kits to start their own business. But even after getting the kits, they did not know where

to buy the drugs once they finished what they had been given. I saw an opportunity and started the agrovets business to bridge the gap in service delivery.

Lokolio credits her success to hard work, resilience and discipline that she says drives any business. Popularly known as Daktari in Lodwar, she draws satisfaction in seeing how the drugs she sells assist locals in not only generating income but keeping their animals healthy.

Mentors other women to become business leaders

Equally refreshing to her is giving back to the community. Lokolio says her biggest fulfillment is mentoring other women to succeed and become leaders in what they do.

True to her philosophy, she runs a mentorship programme that has benefited over 10 women, who now run their own businesses.

"I have been able to push the county government to award them tenders through the 30 per cent procurement quota set aside for women, youth and people with disability. Through this intervention, most of these women have been able to access tenders from the county government."

In addition to mentorship, she was instrumental in the establishment of the Entrepreneurs Women Forum, where she offers motivational speeches and, together with other women business entrepreneurs, use such forums to educate women on how to remain grounded in business.

"I give knowledge for free. I

<<FROM PAGE 15 target women related programming and have spearheaded efforts to start merry-go-rounds within the community.” Commonly known as Sweetie, these groups have helped to empower the women economically.

Pending issues

Lokolio however says there are many pending issues that need to be addressed to enable women in Turkana County succeed.

“The business environment in this county is harsh for women. But we will not relent. We are still going to demand a roundtable with the county officials to explore ways through which the county can generate gainful employment for the youth and women. This is besides increasing their access to opportunities to boost economic growth at the county level in line with Vision 2030.”

Her cry is for the county to put in place initiatives that are sustainable. “We do not want grants as they are not sustainable. We are tired of images that forever depict women in this county as poor and marginalised. We want the county government to put in place measure that enable women to access funds.”

Her advice to women

But even as she fights for women to enjoy a piece of the cake, she wants them rise to the occasion. Lokolio says that many women fear starting businesses or those who are already in it, fear growing big. She notes that start-up capital remains a big challenge to women who want to start businesses.



Majority fear that they will fail and therefore are unwilling to take risks.

ELIZABETH LOKOLIO, FOUNDER
SILO AGROVET



“Majority fear that they will fail and therefore are unwilling to take risks. We need to build their capacity and connect them to sources where they can get funding to support their businesses.”

The other big problem facing women is identifying and analysing a viable business idea. On this, Lokolio advises that the government and other development partners need to build the capacities of women on understanding the market, identifying the gaps, and taking advantage of opportunities. They also need to know how to add value to what they are dealing with for them to be competitive.

Still, Lokolio believes that women must learn to start small and grow big. “Those willing to start a similar business must acquire skills relevant to the field they want to engage in. This will ensure that qualifications do not knock them out.”

Lessons learnt

Another tip she has for women getting into or already in business is the need to offer quality services and treat customers well for their businesses to be sustainable.

“You must be consistent in what

you are offering. Try to reach many people, incorporate a service element to your products as a way of adding value and making the products competitive.”

She has also learnt that business is all about identifying opportunities, taking calculated risks, being strategic, and then working on how to mitigate risks that come with doing business.

“Over the years, I have discovered I am a risk taker and it is really liberating. I am not afraid to dream big or make huge targets.”

“But,” she notes, “Before embarking on any project with my team, I research a lot about service providers in the targeted area. I compliment this with networking because I believe that people are the most important resources one can have.”

By end of 2020, Lokolio was running a network of 32 agents across the county who are now selling drugs in their respective regions, far from Lodwar town. “Farmers enjoy the same products at the same price 100 kilometres away from Lodwar.”

It is the larger-than-life status that Lokolio has acquired that makes her one of the most sought-after persons. She is preferred by the locals to lead key formations. The critical positions she has held or is still holding include chairperson of Sorghum Cow Peas cluster community under the Arid project; chairperson of the Development Committee in Turkana West Sub County and the community liaison officer for Tullow projects.

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A voter casting his vote during the 2022 general elections.

SIGs: Long walk to full inclusion

BY FAITH MUIRURI

The 2022 elections marked an important political moment for the Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Apart from the constitutional and legislative measures in place to promote participation and representation of SIGs, there was a significant increase in civic and gender awareness on why they mattered.

The support they got is bolstered by the provisions in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 that calls on stakeholders

to ensure that these groups enjoy their fair share of representation and access to other fundamental rights.

Article 100 of the Constitution of Kenya, for instance, serves as an overarching principle in promoting representation of marginalised groups notably women, youth, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), ethnic and other minorities.

Article 27 calls for equality and access to a range of other rights among them freedom from discrimination based on

ethnic or social origin, age, sex, disability, and religion among others.

These two Articles buttress the importance of other key laws including the Representation of Special Interest Group Laws (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the Gender Bill of 2011 (and subsequent Amendments) which provide that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender.

Another important policy and legislative development was the amendment of the Political Parties Act ahead of the 2022 elections. This paved the way for the issuance of direct tickets to women by political parties such as Orange Democratic Movement and Ford Kenya.

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Voters casting their votes in the 2022 general elections.

<<FROM PAGE 17 The Political Parties Act requires political parties to ensure representation of SIGs in the party's governing body and in its membership. In addition, the law provides for the establishment of the Political Parties' Fund (PPF), of which 15 per cent is set aside towards promoting political participation of SIGs.

Initiatives that were put in place to increase the involvement of SIGs in political processes include intense awareness by the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) on the SIGs' right to participate in the electoral processes.

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) on the hand was tasked with ensuring that the lists submitted by political parties seeking to participate in a parliamentary election comply

with the provisions of article 81(b) of the constitution that speaks to the two thirds gender rule.

According to Frankline Mukwanja, the Executive Director of Centre for Multi-Party Democracy (CMD), the 47 affirmative action seats have provided useful training grounds for increased political participation among SIGs, with women who have previously served in the different seats transiting to elective seats.

For instance, Kawira Mwangaza, Governor of Meru County and Gladys Wanga, Governor, Homa Bay County, previously served as Woman Representatives.

Other beneficiaries of the Woman Representative seat who have since transited to other elective seats are Wanjiku Muhia, the MP for Kipipiri; Gathoni Wa Muchomba, the MP for Githunguri; Ruweida

Mohammed, the MP for Lamu East, and Rosa Buyu, the MP for Kisumu West.

Nominated persons who have transited to elective seats include Cecily Mbarire, the current governor of Embu; and MPs Millie Odhiambo, Beatrice Elachi and Naisula Lesuuda.

The 2022 elections also saw the election of SIGs among them Linnet Toto, the 24-year-old Woman Representative of Bomet County.

Despite the gains made to bring onboard special interest groups; trends indicate that the SIGs still have a long road to travel before attaining equity and equality, especially in elective politics.

Previous attempts to increase the number of SIGs have not yielded much. For instance, the legislation on gender affirmative action still remains a contentious issue. It has

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<<FROM PAGE 18 failed to be passed in three consecutive parliaments; that is, in 2011 during the 10th Parliament, in 2015 and 2016 during the 11th Parliament, and in 2017 during the 12th Parliament.

“These failures to enact the law eventually led to a Chief Justice’s advisory in 2020 for the president to dissolve Parliament because its composition was considered unconstitutional,” said Mukwanj, during a recent interview with Sauti Sasa.

With respect to PWDs, the Constitution of Kenya 2010 provides that Parliament shall enact legislation that ensures voting is simplified, transparent, and aligned to the needs of PWDs.

As a consequence, Parliament enacted the Representation of Special Interest Groups (Amendment) Act, 2019 which provides for mechanisms of funding to SIGs. It also provides for the establishment of a platform to advocate for accessibility of electoral infrastructure including technology, voter registration, and polling stations that work for PWDs. One key need relating to visually impaired persons was the need to ensure that such voters are able to recognise names of candidates using braille.

This, however, was not implemented in the 2022 elections. Interestingly, a few months to this election, around October 2021, IEBC promised



These failures to enact the law eventually led to a Chief Justice’s advisory in 2020 for the president to dissolve Parliament because its composition was considered unconstitutional,”

FRANKLINE MUKWANJA, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CENTRE FOR MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY



PWDs that the agency would procure special booths which could be accessed by those with physical disability to ensure secrecy of their votes and convenience during marking of ballot papers. Again, this was not realised. Further, an audit of the 2022 elections from an inclusion perspective by the CMD reveals that only a small number of youth turned up for voter registration. At the closure of the exercise in February 2022, IEBC had targeted 4.5 million voters but realised only 1.03 million voters representing a paltry 22.9 per cent of the target.

As far as 2016, the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) in one of its reports had warned that there was a low uptake of national identity cards among the youth which hindered their participation in the 2017

general election.

The NGENC report noted that in Kenya, the youth would normally apply in huge numbers for identity cards (IDs) in order to register for mobile money services and higher education. That means the low voter registration is essentially due to voter apathy.

In addition to the ID challenge, the audit by CMD notes that weak internal democracy in political parties continue to hinder the participation and representation of SIGs.

“This has given rise to the practice of the so-called negotiated democracy whereby SIGs are made to step down for non-SIG candidates.”

According to the audit, political parties should review the so-called negotiated democracy and refrain from asking SIGs to step down in favour of non-SIG candidates.

“In this respect, the political parties should develop an attitude that winning an elective seat is not an end in itself. That means, even if an SIG candidate would fail to win, that experience is important for future electoral bids.

The audit calls for intensified trainings including other means of advocacy such as the People’s Dialogue Festivals, and publication of information and education materials to increase participation of SIGs in political and other processes.

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