

# Sauti Sasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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## Investing in gender equality



# In This Issue:

p3

Gender equality advocates emphasize that implementation of Article 81(b) of the Constitution of Kenya is feasible



p5

We argue why Investing in Women will Accelerate Progress towards gender equality and women empowerment.



p7

Cecilia Ayot shares her story of not giving up in quest for political leadership even if it means going against the grain



p9

The dilemma of teenage pregnancy in Samburu and how it affects empowerment of girls



p11

Terry Mbuchi tells her story of political smartness



p13

Mutinda decries the fewer number of women in the National Assembly and the Senate and how this impacts negatively on their performance in Committees



p15

How Sarah Malel is scaling the political ladder in Uasin Gishu



p18

The crisis of teenage mothers in Nakuru county





# It is now or never on the equality principle, legislators say



Members of KEWOPA receiving a report on the framework for the implementation of the not more than two-thirds gender principle from the Multi-Sectoral Working Group on March 5, 2024.

BY HENIX OBUCHUNJU

Women leaders have intensified the push for the adoption of a formula that will lead to the actualisation of the two-thirds gender principle as provided for in the Constitution of Kenya.

This rule seeks to ensure fair representation of men and women in decision-making positions across various sectors of society.

During a National Dialogue on the Two-Thirds Gender Principle in March, 2024, organised by Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (Kewopa), women leaders said it was time women were given what they have been yearning for more

than five decades.

The forum's purpose was to look into the proposed Multi-Sectoral Working Group (MSWG) recommendations and formula around the realisation of the two-thirds gender rule.

MSWG was established by the Cabinet Secretary for Gender, Culture, the Arts & Heritage, in February 2024, and tasked to formulate a framework for the implementation of the two-thirds gender principle as enshrined in Articles 27(6) and (7), as well as 81(b) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Over the course of its work, MSWG reviewed memorandums,

analysed best practices from other jurisdictions, engaged relevant experts and institutions, and conducted stakeholder consultations and public participation. One of the key recommendations is a formula on how to actualise the two-thirds gender principle.

Among the legislators present were: Beatrice Elachi (Dagoretti North), Jane Kagiri (Laikipia County), Rachael Nyamae (Kitui South), Edith Nyenze (Kitui West) and Ruweida Obo (Lamu East).

Speaking at the Forum, Daisy Amdany, the co-chairperson of MSWG, proposed inserting a transitional clause in Article

PAGE>>4

<<FROM PAGE 3 98A to enable the current Parliament to conform to Article 81(b) requirements.

“Amending Article 97 to provide for a formula to nominate additional special seat members of the National Assembly, if, after the declaration of results following a General Election, the membership of the National Assembly does not conform to the constitutional principle,” Amdany said.

Her team further noted that arguments by some people that it would be costly to have additional lawmakers to realise the two-thirds principle were untrue.

“Please do not accept formulas that will not get us the two thirds gender rule. Do not accept negotiating downwards of what is a constitutional entitlement,” warned Daisy.

Laikipia Woman Representative Jane Kagiri urged members of the public to change their attitudes about men and leadership.

“Let women take leadership positions. If you walk to a meeting, take the front seats, don’t assume leadership is left for men,” said Kaguri.

The MSWG’s report emphasises the importance of mobilising resources and creating an enabling environment to support the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule. It recognises the significance of collaboration between stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector, to drive meaningful change around gender equality and women empowerment.

Kitui South MP Rachael Nyamai

urged political parties to ensure women are elected by deliberately supporting their quest for leadership positions.



**Please do not accept formulas that will not get us the two thirds gender rule. Do not accept negotiating downwards of what is a constitutional entitlement,**

DAISY AMDANY, THE CO-CHAIRPERSON OF MSWG,



“This matter has been discussed by the 11th, 12th and 13th Parliaments. I think it is a matter of life and death now,” said Nyamai, urging men in Parliament and the society to support women.

She also urged financiers of elections to support women who have shown interest in political positions.

Her sentiments were echoed by Dagoretti, North Member of Parliament Beatrice Elachi, who urged the 47 governors to keep supporting women-led initiatives in their respective counties.

The MSWG report further emphasises the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure the effective implementation of the proposed measures. It highlights the importance of accountability and transparency in tracking progress and addressing obstacles during the implementation process.

During the forum, participants drawn from civil society and members of the public commended the efforts of the MSWG in developing the framework and acknowledged the vital role it plays in addressing gender disparities.

The two-thirds gender rule is a constitutional provision in Kenya that aims to promote gender equality and ensure that no gender is underrepresented in public institutions. The principle requires that not more than two-thirds of the members of any public body shall be of the same gender.

The debate surrounding the two-thirds gender rule in Kenya has been ongoing for several years. The provision was included in the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, but its implementation has faced many challenges. The main issue has been achieving gender balance in the National Assembly and the Senate.

On more than three occasions, Parliament has been unable to enact a law to operationalise the principle. Several attempts to amend the law have failed to garner the necessary support. Some people argue that the rule should be implemented gradually to allow for a transition period, while others believe that the rule should be enforced immediately upon enactment by Parliament.

This push and pull made former Chief Justice David Maraga, in September 2020, to rule that Parliament be dissolved for failing to pass legislation to implement the two-thirds gender rule. Maraga termed the formation of Parliament unconstitutional

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# Women legislators call for increased investment in gender equality initiatives

BY FAITH MUIRURI

As Kenyans joined the rest of the world in marking International Women’s Day (IWD), women leaders across the political divide called for increased investment in women empowerment programmes tailored towards the realisation of gender equality.

In reaffirming the 2024 IWD theme: Invest in Women and Accelerate Progress, the women Members of Parliament and Senators cited Article 100 of the Constitution of Kenya which promotes representation of marginalised groups notably women, youth, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

The legislators singled out Article 27 of the Constitution, which they said was key in pushing for equality and access to other range of rights, among them, freedom from discrimination based on ethnic or social origin, age, sex, disability and religion, among others.

“We need to push for the actualisation of these constitutional provisions to help break the barriers and create an environment where all women are valued and respected,” said the legislators. But, they warned, this can only happen if there is greater investment in gender equality programmes.

Among those present were: Beatrice Elachi, the MP for



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

Dagoretti North; Crystal Asige, a nominated senator representing persons with disability; Jane Njeri Maina, the Woman Representative for Kirinyaga County; and former nominated MP Denittah Ghati.

Speaking during the People’s Dialogue Forum organised by the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD) under the banner Inspiring Inclusion, the legislators reiterated that the constitutional clauses have not only served to inspire inclusion but have helped to promote diversity in leadership and decision-making platforms.

“We have the Affirmative Action seats as outlined in the constitution among them the 47 Woman Representative seats and the nominated seats in the Senate, as well as the national and county assemblies, which have gradually increased the number of women in Parliament,” said Jane Njeri Maina, the Woman Representative for Kirinyaga County.

According to her, there is need to educate the public to understand the value of women’s inclusion in the political arena.

“Women bring PAGE>>6

<<FROM PAGE 5

unique perspectives before the floor of the House and we must celebrate gains made by women MPs in actualising certain legislative processes that promote the rights of marginalised groups.”

For instance, she noted, women contributed tremendously to the enactment of family and gender-based violence legislations. These are: Matrimonial Property Act, Marriage Act, Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, and Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act. These laws have gone a long way to protect and advance women rights.

She, however, points out that Parliament remains insensitive to young women legislators.

“For instance, we do not have breastfeeding rooms to cater for lactating women legislators in Parliament. It is like we are being told to put on hold our reproductive roles.

“Women in the 21st century do not have to put on hold their reproductive roles at the expense of jobs and therefore we must be provided with a conducive environment to thrive.”

The women leaders also spoke about unfairness in the allocation of funds to enable them engage in development projects in their areas of jurisdiction.

They talked of huge disparities of how allocations are done.

For instance, they noted, each Member of Parliament in a single constituency has a staggering budget of Sh180 million to enable them execute projects in their constituents; while the 47 County MPs receive a mere Sh9 million for each constituency, which is not enough to undertake meaningful development.

They were disappointed that the County MPs are supposed to represent women, youth and persons with disabilities with the meagre resources yet they are put on the same weighing scale as MPs in single constituencies during electioneering period.



**Political experts think these disparities and low allocation to development projects for County MPs might explain why there is a high turn-over for women county MPs every election cycle, with majority of them unable to retain their seats.**



The legislators argue that for inclusion to succeed, there is need to bridge the gap in financing disparities at the Legislature level and pay disparities in the private sector.

There was a feeling that policies guiding many institutions, including Parliament, do not allow women to thrive.

Crystal Asige, a nominated senator representing persons with disability observed: “Even as we talk about the two-thirds gender rule, we must promote inclusion by pushing for the equal representation of other marginalised groups.”

Asige at the same time urged women in political parties to speak out against inequalities within political parties and demand they invest in gender equality initiatives.

“We must be bold, intentional and radical to inspire inclusion within political parties. We need advocacy and policy change to help deal with structural barriers at the political and national level.

Ghati expressed optimism about the effectiveness of women leaders in Parliament, bringing about change that promote gender equality. But she said that this can only happen if women leaders speak with one voice at political rallies or other forums.

Ghati challenged MPs to ensure the country attains and upholds the two-thirds gender principle that is key to attaining fair representation in the National Assembly.

“The more women we have in Parliament, the easier it becomes to pass gender responsive legislations and champion for things like the free sanitary towels in schools.

Beatrice Elachi, the MP for Dagoretti North and the Vice Chair of Kenya Women Parliamentarians, reminded the women MPs that the gradual increase in the number of women in all arms of government is as a result of consistent and tireless efforts of “our pathfinders whose shoulders we stand on.”

“It is important that female legislators understand the history of women empowerment so that they soldier on with full appreciation of those who came before them.”

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Cecilia Ayot, a former MCA of Laini Saba Ward in Kibra Constituency, Nairobi.

# Winning and losing: Ayot's political journey

BY CLARET ADHIAMBO

For Cecilia Ayot, winning and losing in elections are familiar experiences in her political journey: She has won one election and lost two.

But the 2022 election gave her more sorrow than any other election she has participated in. She encountered countless painful experiences that left a bad taste in her mouth.

Ayot feels she lost the elections not because of lack of competence, but due to a massive

smear campaign against her.

"I remember some days trying to wake up in the morning to hit the campaign, but resisting the urge out of fear of what my opponents were going to do next," says Ayot, a former MCA of Laini Saba Ward in Kibra Constituency, Nairobi.

She says the pain of losing an election can linger on for many years, and sometimes affects future decisions women make in regard to political contests. That is why there are arguments that women who lose elections require psychological support.

Ayot's journey into politics started in 2013 when her constituents prodded her to vie for a political seat. They felt she would offer effective leadership based on her track record of running transformative social initiatives targeting women and girls in the Kibera community.

"Growing up in Kibera, I saw many women and girls suffer a lot because of lack of water. Young girls were forced to exchange sex for water. These were some of the issues that I tried to address."

But one obstacle stood between her and contesting **PAGE>>8**

<<FROM PAGE 7 for a political seat: Academic qualification. However, Ayot who dropped out of high school in 1995 after she got pregnant, vowed this was not going to stop her ambitions.

She sat the Kenya Certificate of Secondary of Education in 2012 in order to qualify to vie in the 2013 elections. Like many other women, she says, the decision to vie in 2013 was baptism by fire into the world of politics.

It was tough. She lost the contest. But in 2017, she used the lessons she learnt to win that year's election. She believes her work with the communities in Kibera to access water and education saw her win the hearts of many voters in the ward.

Her happiness did not last for long. Her decision to go against the position of the political party that took her to the assembly on the impeachment of the then speaker Beatrice Elachi, who is currently the MP for Dagoretti North, made her unpopular.

"I was de-whipped from all committees as punishment," she says.

Again, she skillfully used the same party machinery to resolve her issues. Her game-plan was to manage the acrimonious relationship before the 2022 elections. What she did not realise was that many people were still unhappy with her. They hatched a plan to finish her politically.

"All other sitting women MCAs were given a direct ticket, except me. Worse still, I was made aware that the party was conducting

nominations on the very day the nominations were being conducted. I did not have agents, my supporters were not prepared to participate, it was all chaos," she recalls.



**"So many women are struggling in county assemblies and Parliament, trying to master their roles and rules of engagement. They need help,"**

—CECILIA AYOT, A FORMER MCA OF LAINI SABA WARD IN KIBRA CONSTITUENCY, NAIROBI.



Still, she participated in the nominations, and won. Her grassroots networks came to her aid at this time of need.

"This was one of the highlights of my campaigns in 2022. Winning the nominations that were designed for me to lose," she says.

This win made her reach out to many organisations to support her as she prepared for the elections. Very few did. For some, they could not support her because the design of their support programme did not include MCAs. This reasoning left her confused.

"For us to attain two-thirds gender rule, women need to be empowered from the grassroots. It is these women (MCAs) who grow up to become future MPs, governors and even senators," she says.

All these developments helped her to draw key lessons from previous and the 2022 elections. One of it is that technology can be used to build or destroy you.

In fact, in the 2022 elections, Ayot says due to the online violence she faced in 2013 and 2017 elections, she avoided online engagements in the 2022 elections.

Instead, she used her development record and grassroots networks to woo voters and engage in door-to-door campaigns.

The irony, notes Ayot, is that it is the same technology, a post on Facebook, that saved her from being rigged out during party nominations.

She feels that to consolidate the gains and ensure women like her continue winning, development partners should invest in empowering women vying for the MCA position as well.

"They need to look for the ones already elected and continue empowering them," she notes.

This support, she feels, should go beyond elections.

"So many women are struggling in county assemblies and Parliament, trying to master their roles and rules of engagement. They need help," she says.

Ayot also feels that gender advocates need to do a post-election analysis with women who lost so as to understand what went wrong and establish a support system for them.

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# Long walk to gender equality for Samburu teenage mothers



## BY AWC FEATURES CORRESPONDENT

**J**osephine Naserian (not her real name) sits pensively in her mother's manyatta, nursing her three-month-old baby.

Next to her in this quiet and cramped bedroom that also serves as the living area is her mother, equally absorbed in thought.

This is Kisima village, near Maralal town, in Samburu County, a place that has become Naserian's home after the man who impregnated her absconded his responsibilities.

"This is not what I bargained for. But I have to accept and support my daughter," says Naserian's mother.

Naserian's world crumbled when she had to drop out of school in 2023 while in Form Two due to pregnancy. Her dream of becoming a teacher was shattered.

Today, her fate lies in her father's hands.

Naserian's only consolation was that the perpetrator, a moran, paid a penalty to the family for the troubles he caused her. This was after elders adjudicated the matter and asked him to pay the fine.

"I don't know what the future holds for me and my baby because my fate is in the hands of my father," says Naserian, "I have observed them holding several meetings but we are not privy to any of the discussions."

According to 18-year-old Naserian, going back to school is the best option for her to realise her dream. But there are many challenges she has to overcome, especially after being in a boarding school.

"The nearest school from here is about 10 kilometres away and I am unable to commute due the distance," she says.

"On the other hand, **PAGE>>10**

<<FROM PAGE 9 I have no one to take care of my baby because my mother is overwhelmed with household chores, which include taking care of livestock.”

Naserian is among many girls in Samburu County whose future hangs in the balance due to unplanned pregnancies and child marriages. This has impacted on the efforts to increase the number of women and girls empowered in this communities. It is no surprise that Samburu County is one of those lagging behind in gender equality ratings.

It is equally sad to note that while Kenya celebrates remarkable progress towards gender parity in institutions of learning, the story is different for girls from pastoralist communities. For young women like Naserian, the theme for the 2024 Women’s Day of Investing in Women to Accelerate Progress is a must do.

According to Milcah Lolkorum, the Executive Director for Community Safety Initiative based in Maralal, the pastoralist girl child faces myriad challenges on their pathway to empowerment. These include retrogressive cultures such as Female Genital Mutilation and child marriages.

“The education of the girl child is not prioritised by families since they are looked at in terms of the number of livestock they will bring, in terms of bride price when they

are married off to older men,” laments Lolkorum.

Lolkorum adds that many girls are denied justice when they face violations as their cases are resolved by elders as was the case with Naserian. A modest penalty in form of livestock and cash is paid and that is it.



**“The education of the girl child is not prioritised by families since they are looked at in terms of the number of livestock they will bring, in terms of bride price when they are married off to older men,”**

**-MILCAH LOKKURUM, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE BASED IN MARALAL**



She says the county is yet to recover from the effects of Covid-19 when many girls were married off to morans who had just graduated during the lock down.

According to a study conducted by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) titled: Towards Attainment of Gender Equality in Kenya’s Education Sector, Kenya has made progress in achieving gender parity with successes in

areas such as pre-primary and primary education. However, gender disparities persist in secondary and tertiary education.

However, in marginalised communities, these gains have been eroded by some of the socio-cultural practices.

Like other countries, Kenya has committed to ensure inclusive, quality education for all by 2030 in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4. The enactment of the Constitution of Kenya in 2010, and the Basic Education Act of 2013, emphasises the right to education for all children, regardless of gender.

Reports from the World Bank indicate that literacy rate in Kenya currently stands at 83%, only a 4% increase from the 2014 literacy rate of 79%. Enrolment in primary schools was 10.3 million in 2021, against a total population of 24 million children; with a completion rate of 49.8% at primary school level and 24.5% at high school level. These are worrying trends.

For girls like Naserian, there is need for a collective and deliberate action to promote girl child education in marginalised communities, including improving infrastructure and ensuring young mothers are given a second chance to pursue their education.

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# Young Mbuchi scaling the political ladder in Embu County



Terry Mbuchi

**BY AWC CORRESPONDENT**

**A**t a tender age, Terry Mbuchi had started exhibiting qualities that would later see her serving in leadership positions in primary and secondary school.

After completing school, she emerged herself in active politics, campaigning for political bigwigs. But it was not until she joined Martin Wambora’s campaign team that her fortunes blossomed.

“Wambora was defending his governor seat in Embu County. I was only 26 years old when I joined a group of young people who were supporting his candidature, and together we started by registering young people to Jubilee party.

Although she was a teacher at Karurumo Primary School, she made sure she spent her evenings registering Jubilee party members.

“I would educate people how to register in the political party and by the end of the exercise I had registered over 4,000 people.”

She would later be formally inducted into Wambora’s campaign team. “The governor not only retained his seat but together we were able to deliver votes to the Jubilee coalition during the 2017 elections.

This huge success opened doors for her: She was nominated as a Member of Embu County Assembly in recognition of her contribution to the party and Wambora’s win.

At the county assembly, Mbuchi emerged as a strong voice and was able to champion for the rights of young people, including ensuring that needy students benefitted from the governor’s bursary kitty.

“I also lobbied for the refurbishment of Kathagari youth polytechnic and made sure more young people acquired skills that made them competitive in the job market.”

Her investment in development projects, helping young people and her visibility paid off. In the 2022 elections, she registered a resounding victory for the Kyeni ward seat.

**How she did it**

Mbuchi had to be strategic to win with such a margin. Now the Majority Whip in the Assembly, she started by branding and marketing herself as a servant leader. With this, she received a lot of support from the electorate which motivated her to go further.

“I also put together a credible team to support my bid because you cannot campaign alone. Having been part of Martin Wambora’s campaign team, I learnt you have to handpick your campaign team so that they can own your vision. Otherwise, if you just pick volunteers, they will not deliver.”

Mbuchi had also initiated several development projects in the ward which she says gave her an

**PAGE>>12**

<<FROM PAGE 13 edge over her opponents.

One of them was ensuring that bright and needy students in her ward received bursary kitty from the governor's office. She personally sponsored 58 orphaned and vulnerable children through their primary, secondary and tertiary education.

On the governance front, she advocated for public participation to enable the public influence decision-making processes around policy, legislation, service delivery, oversight and development matters within the county.

The Constitution of Kenya requires all public entities, including the county government, to provide information to the public in a transparent and timely manner; engage the public in decision-making; and respond to their needs.

"I pushed for gender responsive budgeting process. I made sure that the county allocates resources to build a maternity wing in Kiambu sub-location. I also lobbied the county officers to address perennial water problems in Karima Mworu ward," she says.

But she knew that her development record was going to deliver even greater number of votes, if she aligned herself with political candidates that were favourites in the eyes of the voters.

"I did not campaign in isolation. I teamed up with candidates vying for MP, gubernatorial and senatorial seats. I was lucky I managed to team up with the winning team and we bagged all the seats in Embu County," she recalls.

### It is a journey of challenges

Mbuchi says that her political journey has not been without challenges. "I have been abused and threatened as a woman politician. I also come from a community where tradition dictates that politics is a male preserve and women should take a back seat."

When she launched her campaigns for the MCA seat, for instance, she had just given birth. Her opponents made it their political fodder to argue that she is not fit to be a leader.

"My opponents used this to ridicule me and demanded that I should go and breastfeed the baby. I however used their statements to garner support from the women voters."

Mbuchi, however, says lack of adequate financial resources derailed some of the projects she had initiated in the ward, noting that while elected MCAs had a development kitty, their nominated counterparts are forced to use their own money to finance community projects.

The culture of handouts, she says, remains one of the biggest challenges for women during political campaigns. "Most people expect that every time you appear, you need to give them money. I tried very much to convince people that aspirants do not contest for political seats because they have money but because they have a passion to lead."

### Lessons Learnt

These experiences have offered her important lessons. One of them is how to be resilient, brave and spiritual. "You will always

need a fall-back plan because sometimes everyone will run away from you, but if you are spiritual, you can overcome."

She also learnt that women aspiring for leadership must have a passion for political parties before seeking elective seats.

"They have to join political parties and start doing something in their locality," she says.

Mbuchi urges women to go back to school to acquire the relevant academic credentials to avoid being locked out of political contests. "Most women want to contest but they do not have the relevant academic credentials."

"In addition, affirmative action seats are only supposed to give you a head start and thereafter bid for elective seats. If you don't, then the seats will not have any meaningful impact."

In addition, she says, women must present themselves for elective seats. "I find it difficult to believe that Kenyans will not elect us. I will tell you without fear of contradiction that Kenyans are giving women a chance and they are ready to elect them. But only a few of us are presenting ourselves to the electorate."

She says there is a change of heart among voters, and this can be attested by the number of women elected as governors and senators.

"Let us focus on competitive seats. All we need is for political parties to give us an enabling environment and we will win."

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Nominated Senator Tabitha Mutinda at her office PHOTO: HENIX OBUCHUNJU

# Concern over fewer women in parliamentary committees

BY HENIX OBUCHUNJU

It is said that politics is not for the fainted-hearted. Thus, women leaders face a double challenge being politicians in a male-dominated field.

Women face numerous setbacks when playing their roles as leaders and decision makers. This sometimes hinders their ability to contribute to legislative roles.

Nominated Senator Tabitha Mutinda is one such legislator who is experiencing the many challenges women political leaders face.

As a newcomer to politics,

Mutinda says one of the areas that is hitting women hard due to their low numbers in Parliament is participation in crucial Senate committees.

“Being one of the 21 women out of 67 senators, our legislative role is hampered due to poor representation in committees. Yet, it is in these committees where the real work is done,” Mutinda laments.

This underrepresentation of women in these committees directly affects their influence and ability to shape policy decisions.

The other challenge is balancing her roles as a mother and a parliamentarian.

She says juggling multiple responsibilities can be arduous for women compared to their male counterparts who are not subjected to similar societal expectations.

“At times, it is difficult to match the energy levels of men who have the luxury of focusing solely on their political careers,” says Mutinda.

“I wish we had 46 women and 21 men in the Senate.”

Despite the obstacles, Mutinda has secured a position as the vice chair of the Finance and Budget committee. She credits the support and guidance the committee’s secretariat accords

PAGE>>14

<<FROM PAGE 13

her. It is this support that has helped her to successfully integrate into the committee's processes.

She, however, expresses concern over the lack of mentorship for women leaders, particularly from experienced male counterparts.

"When I chair the committee, the high expectations that I possess extensive knowledge on finance matters abound," she explains, concerned about the additional pressure placed on women to prove their competence.

The senator also serves in the financial committee in the Senate, which oversees the expenditure of funds in counties.

According to Mutinda, she frequently encounters situations where male leaders from counties appear before the committee without any female representation. While her male colleagues fail to acknowledge the issue, Senator Mutinda consistently questions this discrepancy, leading to conflicts with her male counterparts.

The first-time senator equally faces the contempt of elected male leaders, especially towards nominated members.

"They want to be seen as the sole contributors in specific discussions," she explained, highlighting the dismissive attitude towards nominated members, often viewed as mere placeholders to fulfil the quorum requirement.

Daisy Amdany, the Executive Director of Community Advocacy and Awareness (CRAWN) Trust, says the key players in addressing these challenges are political parties; which need to provide

more opportunities for women politicians to vie for elective posts.

"By offering more party tickets to women, political parties can help bridge the gender gap in leadership positions and foster a more inclusive political



**"By offering more party tickets to women, political parties can help bridge the gender gap in leadership positions and foster a more inclusive political landscape,"**

DAISY AMDANY, THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS (CRAWN) TRUST,



landscape," says Amdany.

The 2022 elections witnessed a positive shift in political participation and representation of women. More women candidates were gazetted by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), in 2022 compared to 2017, leading to increased number of women elected in various political positions.

Notably, the number of elected Members of Parliament increased from 23 in 2017 to 29 in 2022. Despite this progress, Daisy asserts that these figures are insufficient to guarantee sufficient number of women who can increase women representation committees in

the National Assembly and the Senate.

At the Senate, Mutinda in February, while supporting the report, noted that women feel left out and want a gender parity clause to be part of the NADCO report.

In her quest to address these gaps at Parliament level, Mutinda says the principles enshrined in the Maputo Protocol serve as a guiding light for National Assembly and Senate committees.

The protocol, a visionary document adopted by the African Union, sets forth a comprehensive framework to protect and promote women's rights across the African continent.

The protocol emphasises the need for women to participate effectively in decision-making processes, including political representation at all levels.

The protocol through the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa has set a 50/50 ratio as the representation of women and men in political and decision-making spaces.

For now, Mutinda's journey is a painful reminder of the barriers women face in politics.

Concerted efforts must be undertaken to increase female representation, provide mentorship opportunities, and challenge the prevailing gender biases in and outside Parliament. Only after such collective actions are taken, will there be a conducive environment that empowers and amplifies the voices of elected women members of Parliament.

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# A Journey of challenges, Triumphs



Sarah Malel, Member of County Assembly for Kimumu Ward in Moiben Sub-County, Uasin Gishu.

BY GIDEON KITO

“My name is Sarah Malel, Member of County Assembly for Kimumu Ward in Moiben Sub-County, Uasin Gishu. I am serving my second term as an elected official, affiliated with the UDA party. Additionally, I hold the position of deputy speaker and possess a bachelor’s degree in Public Administration.

“Prior to joining politics, I ran a hotel and served as the chair of a women’s group. My transition into politics was motivated by the opportunities presented by the new constitution, particularly in terms of women’s representation

in county assemblies.

“My journey in politics began in 2010, and despite initial setbacks, I persisted. In 2013, I contested under URP and Jubilee in 2017, securing a seat in the second assembly. In the 2022 elections, I ran on a UDA ticket.

“My focus has been on serving the people and addressing their needs. I prioritise collecting and incorporating their views into county programmes, particularly in areas such as road infrastructure, water access and education. Through initiatives like financing education costs for underprivileged students, I aim to alleviate poverty and promote social welfare.

“One of my proudest achievements is witnessing the increase in women’s representation in politics. With more women elected, including previously nominated members like Honorable Mary Goretti into the Uasin Gishu County Assembly, it’s evident that support for women in politics yields positive results. Looking ahead, I am optimistic about further increasing women’s participation in politics, especially with conducive environments in future elections. As for my choice of party, I align with UDA due to its popularity and effectiveness in our area.

“My journey into politics was not without its challenges, particularly

PAGE>>16



<<FROM PAGE 15 in a patriarchal society that often overlooks women. In the 2013 elections, I faced manipulation, as seen in the narrow margin of 26 votes during the nomination process. Additionally, being perceived as a non-native candidate raised concerns about my legitimacy in the community, with sentiments such as 'tunataka wenyaji' emphasising the preference for 'sons and daughters of the soil'.

"Despite these hurdles, I drew inspiration from Hon Jebii Kilimo, a trailblazer in Elgeyo-Marakwet politics. Her transformative leadership demonstrated the power of women in uniting communities and driving progress. Witnessing her accomplishments fuelled my determination to

challenge societal norms and pursue leadership in an urban setting.

"Throughout my campaign, I remained focused on my vision for community development, despite personal attacks regarding my marital status and property ownership. Instead of engaging in negativity, I prioritised connecting with voters and addressing their needs. This approach resonated with constituents, leading to unprecedented success in the election.

"Once in office, I wasted no time in advocating for the community's interests. By registering over 200 groups and facilitating access to government funds for entrepreneurship, education, and welfare programmes, we made

tangible strides in improving livelihoods and reducing unemployment.

"Despite lacking significant political backing, I am grateful for the support of my party and, above all, the unwavering solidarity of the people I represent. My campaign strategies prioritised integrity and inclusivity, ensuring that even in defeat, I could maintain relationships and continue my advocacy work without making enemies.

Moving forward, I remain committed to serving with dedication and integrity, inspired by the resilience of those I represent and driven by the vision of a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

"In reflecting on the 2022 elections, I observed a significant shift in the use of technology for information dissemination. In contrast to 2017, the prevalence of social media platforms in 2022 allowed for a broader reach in conveying our achievements and campaign messages.

"Through platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, we effectively showcased our development programmes, facilitating transparency and reducing the need for extensive explanations. Whether it was distributing chicks under the 'Inua Mama na Kuku' initiative or highlighting infrastructure projects like road repairs and youth engagement in drainage works, our efforts were readily visible to the community.

"An outstanding moment for me in the 2022 elections was facing familiar PAGE>>17



<<FROM PAGE 16

competitors who had learned from previous encounters. Recognising their strategies enabled me to navigate the campaign landscape with confidence. Moreover, having served in office for five years alleviated financial constraints, facilitating a smoother campaign process.

“However, challenges persisted, notably during the party primaries when a repeat of nominations was necessitated due to electoral irregularities. This setback was disheartening, compounded by concerns about dwindling finances and potential opposition alliances. Yet, I am grateful for the support received from well-wishers, whose contributions, in resources and morale, buoyed my campaign.

“Reflecting on the broader challenges facing women in politics, a lack of financial resources and societal expectations present significant hurdles. Women often contend with societal biases regarding marital status, property ownership, and tribal affiliations. Overcoming these obstacles requires not only determination but also support from family and communities. Empowering women with financial resources and familial backing can facilitate their entry into politics and contribute to more inclusive governance.

The overwhelming support received in 2017 underscored the community’s desire for change and the importance of understanding and addressing their needs.

“UDA’s emphasis on inclusivity, evidenced by subsidised party registration fees and proactive

measures to support female candidates, has been instrumental in enabling women’s participation in politics. Despite challenges, the party’s support has been invaluable, demonstrating a commitment to fostering diversity and representation in political leadership.



**Effective communication remains paramount in engaging constituents and delivering on campaign promises. Service delivery, informed by grassroots feedback and facilitated by strong project identification committees, remains a cornerstone of my approach to governance.**

SARAH MALEL, MEMBER OF COUNTY ASSEMBLY FOR KIMUMU WARD



“Resource constraints have perennially posed challenges in the political journey of women. Betrayal by those previously relied upon for support have also been disheartening realities. Additionally, the 2022 elections highlighted the pervasive issue of tribalism, particularly in regions like mine, where voting patterns seemed influenced by tribal affiliations, contrary to the non-tribal voting trend observed in

2017.

“The ever-evolving dynamics of politics underscore the need for adaptability. What secured victory in previous elections may not guarantee success in subsequent ones, as political affiliations shift. The lack of consistency poses a significant threat.

“Efforts towards women’s empowerment must extend beyond affirmative action. Women must actively demonstrate their capabilities to voters. Political parties play a crucial role in this by investing in civic education to encourage more women to vie for elective positions rather than solely relying on nominations or favours.

“Moreover, how women present themselves to the public and communicate their platforms remains essential. Balancing the message to appeal to all constituents while championing women’s issues is key. This requires effective communication strategies and grassroots mobilisation to ensure voter turnout.

“I urge young women to embrace their potential and leverage platforms like social media to rally support. They possess the tools to effect change and shape policies that cater to the needs of their generation. Civic education remains vital, as many are yet to fully grasp the opportunities presented by the constitution. Increased awareness will empower women to seize these opportunities and participate fully in governance.

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# Nyangara's passion to give young mothers another chance in life



BY PRISTONE MAMBILI

**N**akuru has been celebrated for many things, from its natural fauna to embracing women leadership. But in the recent past, the county has become infamous for high teenage pregnancy.

In the past five years, the county has been among the

counties with the highest teenage pregnancies in the country. At 18%, the county has a higher teenage pregnancy than the national average, which according to the Kenya Demographic and Health survey, 2022, is at 15%.

In March this year, Nakuru was among the 20 counties that the Kenya Human Rights Commission cited as having

the highest number of teenage pregnancies in the country.

Worse still, Nakuru was among the top five counties, including Nairobi, Kakamega, Bungoma and Kiambu, that were listed for failing to put measures to prevent early pregnancies.

According to UNFPA, teenage pregnancy [PAGE>>19](#)



is attributed to a number of factors including but not limited to low education; limited knowledge of SRH coupled with inadequate parental and societal involvement in the guidance and protection of adolescents; poverty and associated vulnerabilities; early sexual debut; child marriage; FGM, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and inadequate access to friendly and responsive SRH services by adolescents.

The ripple effect of this higher rate of teenage pregnancy is fewer girls are completing school or transiting to college, a development that is threatening women empowerment and gender equality in counties such as Nakuru. If not addressed, experts warn that the county will be losing out on women knowledge and skills development.

Studies show that teenage pregnancies have serious social and economic impacts on families and countries that are experiencing this problem. This includes school completion rates, maternal health completion and the attendant costs, high illiteracy levels and unskilled labour force.

This is the reason 33-year-old Zipporah Mumbi Nyangara has stepped forward to help address this problem and give hundreds of teenage mothers in Nakuru's Free Area estate renewed hope in life.

The mother of two daughters,

Nyangara says her life experiences, those of her close family members, and friends, informed her desire to help these girls. Her urge to help started while she was in high school, when fellow young girls would seek her advice on many things.



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"While in high school, many students came to me with their problems and I helped address them and they believed in me," she says.

This, she adds, was a plus in shaping her passion for counselling career. After completing her high school, she joined Family Health Options

in Nakuru as a volunteer. The organisation addresses many sexual and reproductive health rights issues, including teenage pregnancies.

She pursued her counselling career and earned a Higher Diploma in Psychosocial Counselling and a Diploma in Social work.

Nyangara would later start an organisation known as Haven of Dreams-a Community-Based Organisation, which champions the rights of teenagers, especially teenage mothers in informal settlements such as Free Area, Bondeni and Rhonda.

The organisation focuses on four thematic areas; Mental Health, Reproductive Health Services, Gender Equality Advocacy and Youth Empowerment.

Nyangara says her passion to work with the community started after she saw what young girls were going through as a result of early pregnancy, especially in informal settlements of Nakuru where the problem is getting out of hand.

Her focus now is to help teenage girls and teenage mothers to rediscover their lost glory, go back to school, and raise their self-esteem, since many of them feel the society do not want them.

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