

Sauti Sasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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**Succeeding
against all odds**



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Online violence almost killed my political ambitions

BY FAITH MUIRURI

When Zipporah Kamau decided for a Member of County Assembly (MCA) seat in Kiambu County, it did not occur to her that such move would subject her to massive online violence.

Attacks on her character started immediately when she declared her candidature. Her attackers questioned why she was abandoning her church role to go into dirty politics instead confining herself to church matters.

The abuse was more pronounced on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms, where she was sexually harassed, abused, trolled and stalked by her political opponents.

According to Kamau, who has a Masters degree in Leadership and Governance, her opponents created fake accounts impersonating her and sharing her nude pictures and misinformation about herself.

People who saw the pictures started labelling her as a prostitute and someone who was engaging in sex with other people's husbands. They argued that such a person was unfit to hold any political position.

"My political opponent paid bloggers to harass me and push me out of the race. Most of these bloggers were not using their real identities on social media."



Zipporah Kamau

Then it got worse as the 2022 general elections neared. Her online violations shifted to offline, with people threatening her with physical violence.

"The threats became real. I noticed I was being followed a few times. I was also physically assaulted at one time."

She says she reported the matter to one of the police stations in Nakuru county but no action was taken against her perpetrators.

"The police were repulsive and at one point asked me how I expected them to arrest someone that I could not identify. They also advised me to leave the social media platforms. I heeded

to this advice and left my team deal with the violence."

By the time she was taking this action, the violence was having a heavy toll on her.

"I became very anxious and would wake up in the middle of the night worried about what would be written about me the next day. My family was also affected because of the misinformation going round the platforms. My daughter even wanted us to shift from where we were staying."

As a church leader, she found it difficult to stand in front of the people because of the negative portrayal of her character online.

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<<FROM PAGE 3 “Even today, I have not been fully able to walk in the community without thinking, “what are these people thinking about me.”

Kamau recalls how constant exposure to hate speech and threats left her with a lot of anxiety and stress.

“I did not have enough money to hire bloggers who would rebut or counter the misinformation.”

Her biggest challenge was dealing with a violence that even some of the people she knew, had normalized.

“Many individuals, including some within the political arena, dismissed it as a common aspect of being in the public eye. Overcoming this perception and highlighting the seriousness of online violence still remains a big hurdle.

Some people even told her off and remarked: “What do you expect when you are in the public eye, get used to it.”

In addition to normalization of the online violence, the other challenge she faced was the one of reporting online violence at the police station. “Police officers are not sure how to deal with online violence.”

To circumvent these challenges, Kamau shifted to forums where she openly shared her experiences.

“These forums had women who were going through the same thing so we encouraged each other. I have also become an online safety and anti-harassment champion, both within my political circles and in public forums.

This includes participating in panel discussions, webinars, and

conferences to educate people about the impact of online violence on women in politics.”

Useful lessons learnt

For Kamau, women and girls facing online violence must appreciate the importance of solidarity and support networks. “Connecting with other individuals who have faced similar challenges has been invaluable. Together, we have been able to provide emotional support, amplify our voices, and advocate for change.

Similarly, she has learnt the importance of raising awareness about online harassment, not just for individual benefit but for the broader community.

“By speaking out, I can contribute to a safer digital environment. I have also gained a deeper understanding of online privacy and security. Learning how to protect my personal information and online presence has become a priority to shield myself from further harm.”

Recommendations

To address online violence against women and girls, Kamau underscores the need to train law enforcement agencies on how to handle online harassment cases effectively, including the use of digital evidence and understanding the psychological impact on victims.

“We need to implement educational programs that promote digital literacy, teaching individuals, especially young girls, how to recognize and respond to online harassment.”

Kamau further feels that there is “need to establish easy-to-

use and accessible reporting mechanisms on social media platforms and websites to enable victim to report online harassment”.

This, she notes, should go hand in hand with offering support services for victims of online violence, including counseling, mental health support, and legal assistance.

She calls on women, especially young women experiencing online violence not to suffer in silence.

“Reach out to friends, family, or a trusted mentor who can provide emotional support and guidance during difficult times. Keep records of all instances of online harassment. This includes screenshots, text messages, emails, or any other evidence that can help in reporting or documenting the abuse.”

She urges survivors to utilize reporting mechanisms on social media platforms and websites to report online harassment.

“Follow laid down guidelines for reporting, and provide as much information as possible, review and update your privacy settings on social media platforms to limit the exposure of personal information.

Other things survivors need to do include:

Avoid sharing personal details and location information online

Prioritize self-care whenever faced with online violence.

Engage in activities that help you relax and reduce stress.

Seek support from a mental health professional

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One woman's resolve to put a stop to online violence



Wanjiku Thiga, a communications expert and youth leader believed the work she was doing in her community was to transform society to be more productive and constructive in what they do, especially the young people.

She also believed that young people have the right to express themselves and their views on topical economic, political, and

social issues that have a bearing on their lives.

But it was during her exercising this very freedom of expressing her views on social and political issues that saw her subjected to massive bullying both on online and offline spaces.

“My unfortunate journey into the mucky waters of abuse started when I expressed

my personal opinions on various particularly women reproductive rights. It got worse when I delved into the world of politics and business.”

The more she shared her views on the political and business issues, so did the attacks increase in pace and intensity.

“I was bombarded with body shaming, sexual **PAGE>>6**

<<FROM PAGE 5 threats and derogatory labels like “prostitute” and “home wrecker.”

This onslaught was carried out across multiple platforms, the main ones being Twitter (now X), Facebook and WhatsApp groups. “Weapons used against me online were mostly memes.”

Online violence experts do argue that the increasing intensity of attacks online are always meant to ensure the target is silenced very fast. When the victim is overwhelmed, they will likely leave the online space and close all their accounts, with the perpetrators being the biggest winners.

Thiga says when her attackers felt the online attacks were not having the effect they were looking for, the violence shifted offline.

“At one time someone kissed me forcefully, which is sexual abuse. In another incident, I was locked into a room by people who demanded money to support my political aspirations. In all these incidents, I felt demeaned and genuinely afraid for my life.”

“In response, I decided to step away from certain WhatsApp groups but remained active on other platforms because I still needed them for my business and political ventures.”

She decided not to report the violations to the police. “I felt that reporting to the police would impact my political base negatively, so I chose to endure

the bullying and attacks. This however came with a very significant toll on my mental health and psychological wellbeing. At some point leading to severe anxiety and panic attacks.”

Trying to deal with the violence came with myriad challenges, she notes, particularly rooted in society’s belief about women political leadership.



One of the major challenges was that people do not take online violence as a legit problem.”

WANJIKU THIGA, A COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT AND YOUTH LEADER



“One of the major challenges was that people do not take online violence as a legit problem.”

Another challenge she experienced was victim blaming, with many people saying that women who are abused online got into abuse situations because they were talking unnecessarily.

“These harrowing experiences taught me the importance of mental wellness practices. Now, I advocate for training on matters online and social media, especially for women and girls,

to enable them combat such online threats should it happen to them.”

Her advice to those undergoing similar ordeals is that despite the severity of the attacks, recovery comes with time. “But a person has to ensure regular mental wellness check-ins by talking to friends, family, or therapists.”

Thiga believes that online attacks against women should not silence them from expressing their strong views on political, social and economic issues. This is because these issues affect the women and girls even more than their male counterparts.

Her thoughts are buttressed by many studies and safety manuals that recommend and teach women and girls on how not to be silenced online. Experts argue that leaving the online space or going silence on the very platforms that are mediating the functioning of the modern society is defeatist. It also destroys women empowerment and enjoying the benefits that one gets by being present in the online space. They call on women to never give up.

Indeed, Thiga’s words concur with these experts. She says: “If they want to lynch you, they will unfortunately do. But your voice deserves to be heard. And as long as you are not going against anyone, do not be silenced.”

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Young Nareyo proves that age is just a number even in leadership



Stacy Nareyo

BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

At only 22 years, Stacy Nareyo Lekirimpoto decided to do what many people fear: dive into the world of politics. What she did not know was that by taking that step she was opening many doors that would put her at the centre of political actions.

Her nomination as a Member of County Assembly (MCA) in Samburu County came as huge shock and surprise to her.

Lekirimpoto took over the mantle of political leadership from her mother Roseline Lesaibile who succumbed to Covid -19 virus in 2020.

Her mother was a nominated MCA by the KANU political party , and when she passed on, the party officials decided to have the seat retained in the family.

“She was actively involved in KANU politics and was preparing to run for the Samburu Woman Representative, when she passed on in 2020. When this happened, the party decided to honour her by letting the position be taken up by a family member,” Lekirimpoto recalls.

“I did not aspire to be a political leader before then, but I found myself in a situation where I had to be in politics and I embraced it,” says Lekirimpoto who holds a degree in Tourism and Hospitality.

The nomination came in in November 2021, at a time when the country was warming up to the 2022 general elections.

Lekirimpoto would later shift to the Jubilee Party in 2022 where she was tasked with linking politicians vying under the Jubilee Party in Samburu County with the National Election Council of the party.

“I was the coordinator in Samburu and I did a lot of activities and campaigns in the county during the 2022 elections.”

Her biggest contribution that earned her the nomination ticket as a Youth Representative in the assembly was popularizing the party at the grassroots and supporting the contesting members of her party.

“I could even support some of the Jubilee contestants financially and rally the young people to support our candidates.”

Even with these efforts to deliver for the party, she says she still had to fight for her nomination owing to the nature of politics in the community that is widely patriarchal.

“It was not easy because one morning you know you are on the list and the next day your name is not appearing. So I had to keep following the party leadership on the matter until it was finalised.”

Lekirimpoto adds, “Some people had the financial muscle to buy the nomination. I did not have that kind of money. So I had to work extra hard.”

PAGE>>8

<<FROM PAGE 7 Samburu is among the few counties where no woman was elected as a Member of the County Assembly and the women positions were only filled through nominations.

“Even in the Assembly leadership, we still have to fight for our space as women. But I can gladly say civic education has helped our people and now they are slowly embracing women leadership,” she notes.

Samburu West Member of Parliament (MP) Naisula Lesuuda is one of the few women who broke the glass ceiling and fought against the cultural beliefs to win the seat twice. At first she got into politics as a nominated senator.

Lesuuda became the first woman to be elected in Samburu and for that reason Lekirimpoto has a political pillar to look up to

“It had never happened in Samburu being a patriarchal community. That was a big achievement for her. I admire her leadership style and how she relates with her electorate, especially women.”

The challenge of inadequate women representation and male chauvinism also reflects in the Assembly committees, which, Lekirimpoto notes, consists mainly of elected members.

“We [women caucus] are not reflected in the Standing Orders Committees and that has become so hard to get allocation of funds for issues that would help our women and the youth.

However, her bravery and keenness in articulating issues saw her get elected as the Majority Chief Whip in the Assembly.

“That was one of the memorable

moments because the members saw something in me, believed in my leadership, and decided to give them that position regardless of my age. I do not want to lose that trust,” she says.

The position which is mostly a preserve of elected leaders allows her to assist the Leader of Majority to coordinate ideas on, and garner support for proposed legislation, and to manage the party’s legislative program on the Floor of the House.

It is also her role to ensure party discipline in legislative process, meaning, she has to ensure that members of the party vote according to the party position.

Lekirimpoto also sits in the Speaker’s Panel, a position that gives her the opportunity to preside over any sitting in the absence of the speaker and the deputy speaker.

As result of this, she was invited to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum in 2024 to discuss youth and governance issues. Additionally, she serves in the speaker’s panel at the assembly.

Lekirimpoto is using her these positions to see youth and women issues being addressed both in the house business and in terms of budgetary allocations.

Some of the achievements she takes pride in is successfully moving a motion in the assembly on the urgent need to put in place measures to address the burden of teenage pregnancies in Samburu. This was supported by other women leaders in the assembly. Samburu is among the counties with high numbers of teenage pregnancies in the country.

“We have so many meetings with the elders in the villages

to encourage them to take the children to school instead of marrying them at an early age. The numbers are still high but we are making some progress,” she says.

Similarly, Samburu is among the counties that are affected by banditry with Lekirimpoto saying that as a youth leader, meetings with the young people are bearing fruits.

“I have also been deliberate on policies and the budget to make sure that it is responsive to youth issues because I would want to be remembered for that.”

According to her, politics of clannism in her community has proved to be a major hurdle in not only advocating for women leadership, but also in fighting for political ideologies that would benefit the community.

“The clannism issue has found its way in the assembly and sometimes you can’t support a particular leader or whatever they are advocating for because they are from a different clan.”

Even with such difficulties, she is upbeat about the future. Lekirimpoto aspires to vie for a political seat in the 2027 elections, The only obstacle standing in her way is clannism. She can only hope that her candidature will be approved by the elders or she will have to chart her way forward.

“I would like to encourage the young people to go for these elective seats. In Kenya, almost everything revolves around politics and that is where life-changing decisions are made. The young people should also participate in budget-making processes to ensure their interests are captured.”

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Overcoming online violence the Gathoni way



Audrey Gathoni, a Mass Communication professional with keen interests in philanthropy, always knew social media as a perfect space where to engage and advance her philanthropic work.

“I’ve always used social media partly for fun and partly for my

philanthropic work; and I never once thought that any trouble would come out of it.”

But this changed one day when she expressed her views on weight management. She was trying to discuss obesity from a health point of view and advising on how to maintain a good weight to avoid

lifestyle diseases and other ills associated with obesity. Her viewpoints did not go down well with many people. She found herself facing massive online violence and cyber bullying for many days.

“It all began when I fearlessly shared my unconventional viewpoints on various social

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<<FROM PAGE 9 issues. My aim was to spark dialogue because these are pertinent issues affecting many people in the society. Instead, my posts were met with body shaming and demeaning remarks from people. They targeted my physical appearance, particularly my facial features.”

The perpetrators of this violence called her all manner of names and discussed her body features. They described her teeth and the form and shape of her body and face.

“The comments were very hurtful and completely unrelated to the topic at hand. This showed clearly that they were aimed at undermining my credibility and demeaning my character,” she recalls.

The cyber bullying Gathoni experienced were perpetrated mainly on Facebook and Whatsapp platforms where screenshots of her were shared very rapidly. She recalls how this distressed her, took a heavy toll on her mental wellbeing, and affected her normal functioning.

“The more the messages spread, the more trolling and memes increased. Thankfully this all died down eventually but not without leaving deep emotional wounds on me.”

One such negative effect on her was keeping away from the online space for some time. This was to strategically let the incidents fizzle out and

for the perpetrators to lose the appetite of attacking her.

Even with such emotional and psychological torture, Gathoni decided not to report the violence to the police.

“Despite the emotional burden, I refrained from reporting the abuse, fearing that it might not be taken seriously by authorities. I also feared being put through more ridicule, this time by the police if I chose to go and report to them.”

“My coping mechanism was to disregard the negativity, and to remind myself that I was not to blame for what was happening to me. That the trolls were miserable people looking for hapless persons to attack and excite their own insecurities.”

Nevertheless, support came from sections of the internet that were sensible enough to see that the conversations she was sparking were important. It was also comforting for her when health professionals joined in and buttressed her point about the dangers of obesity.

She believes that the challenges she encountered while confronting online violence stemmed from societal attitudes limiting women’s expressions.

But she is happy that the experience offered her very good lessons and reminded her of the need to keep fighting for

her rights.

“In as much as the experience was nasty, I still learnt that I should never compromise my beliefs to conform to other people’s perceptions.”

Gathoni feels the current legal and policy regime does not adequately assure women of online safety. There are also no adequate support systems or awareness of the support women survivors of online violence can turn to.

“I advocate for more responsive resources to combat online violence, stressing the need for accessible support systems. In my case for instance, I did not go to the police because I didn’t feel confident enough that anything would be done,” notes Gathoni

She advises women, especially young women, facing online violence to be resilient and seek help if and when they feel overwhelmed by such violence.

“Talk to someone like a friend, relative, or a therapist. Remember, your self-worth is not defined by the hurtful words other people say online. My journey through online adversity has taught me the importance of resilience and the necessity for support systems in combating cyber bullying, be it from friends, relatives, or authorities.”

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You need to have an agenda to succeed in politics, Nasra

After many years as a leader in the corporate world, Nasra Nanda decided it was time to influence change in society through political leadership.

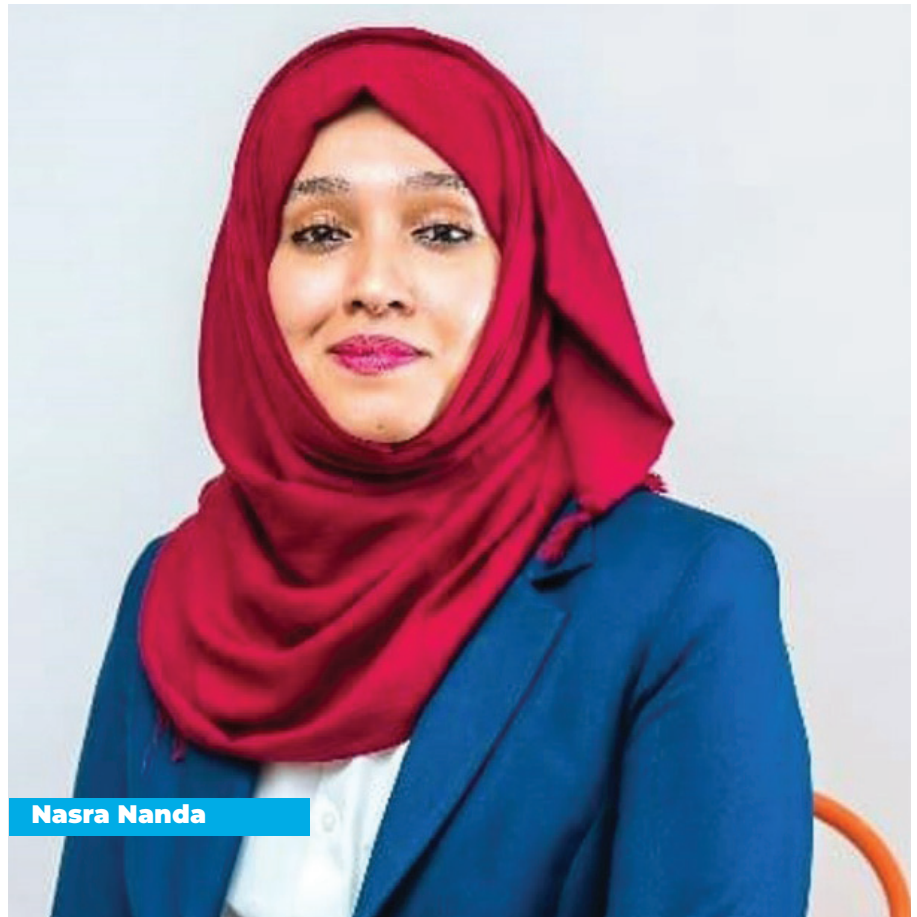
Her interest and support to political parties saw her being nominated by the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) to represent the minority in the Nairobi County Assembly. Her belief being that women should not take up political seats by virtue of their gender, but based on the principle that they can bring about change in their communities.

“As women, we need to have a solid agenda in what we represent and stand for. This will inform the actions we take to lobby on issues we want addressed because when women advocate for issues, vulnerable groups are assured of representation and protection.”

Operating in a county like Nairobi, Nanda says one can be easily swayed by politics of issues. “Women must be skilful if they want to go up the political ladder.”

At the County Assembly, Nanda’s role model is Waihera Chege, MCA for Nairobi West from whom she draws a lot of encouragement on how to navigate through the political tide.

“As a woman, your opinion will



Nasra Nanda

often be overlooked or ignored. But I have learnt from Chege that if you stand for something, keep saying it until people get tired and eventually give you their attention.”

The private sector should also take a keen interest in politics, especially women’s leadership. “A lot of people, especially in the private sector, shy away from politics but complain about lack of service delivery. Service delivery is a reflection of the leaders that

have been elected. If one wants to see things done, they should lobby for more professionals in the county and national assemblies.

“If women are complaining that they are not heard, it is because women are not in these spaces or the women who are qualified are missing. If we say politics is for politicians, we can’t then continue to complain about poor service delivery, because we are not part of the process.”

PAGE>>12

<<FROM PAGE 11 Being in a position of leadership has enabled Nanda to push for various issues that matter to the ordinary citizen. To bring major changes in the lives of many people, she would want to see women leaders identify themselves with an issue or agenda.

Coming from the minority Asian community, and hence representing voices of minority including women, ethnic groups, the youth and people living with disabilities, Nanda says she has identified issues that she needs addressed. One of them is climate change.

As the Chief Executive Officer for Kenya Green Building Society, Nanda is advocating for climate action and promoting creation of green cities, environmental-friendly affordable housing as well as creation of micro forests within cities in Africa to address climate change.

“Kenya is trying to stamp its authority as a climate change champion in Africa and beyond. That is my area of focus in terms of establishing cities and the built environment.”

One of Nanda’s successes in this area include successfully pushing Nairobi City County governor’s office to become the first green office in Africa.

“When we talk about climate change, it is not just about planting trees. We must also consider creating spaces that take into consideration waste management as well as water and energy

efficiency. The only way this can be picked up by everyone is if leaders lead by example.”

Nanda takes pride in successfully pushing for a motion to audit the structural foundation of buildings across the city following the many cases of buildings collapsing.



“When we talk about climate change, it is not just about planting trees. We must also consider creating spaces that take into consideration waste management as well as water and energy efficiency.”

NASRA NANDA, ODM
NOMINATED MCA



“I am concerned about structures collapsing because it is either a foundation or an environmental impact issue that was overlooked or not complied with.”

Her motion in the assembly unlocked conversations that led to the creation of a taskforce to look at the approval processes.

Some of the issues Nanda is also pushing for include efficient energy sources, maximizing the use of natural light as well as efficient water and waste management.

Nanda’s pursuit for climate change matters saw her selected

to the Environment and Planning Committee in the assembly. She is also a member of the Women’s Caucus Committee that pushes for gender issues such as the recent campaign to end femicide.

Being a politician in Nairobi has not been easy especially when advocating on certain issues. Nanda had moved a motion, which if it was adopted, would have seen alcohol selling stores operating at 300 metres radius from learning institutions. “I pushed for the motion but I was attacked because people with interests lobbied to prevent it.”

Such experiences in the County Assembly and as one of the strategists for ODM party has taught Nanda useful lessons. One of them is how to create messages that resonate with the majority of the voters, and then avoiding using technocrats to pass such messages.

As she prepares to climb up the political ladder, Nanda inspiration comes from leaders like the late President Mwai Kibaki for his technocratic approach in governance and Nairobi Senator Edwin Sifuna’s leadership style in articulation of oversight roles on issues affecting Nairobians.

At the global level, Nanda has picked a few lessons from former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. “She showed that leadership can also come with a human face and for me that is key because you are working with people and you need to serve them in a way they can relate to.”

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Beatrice Kerubo turns tables in Kisii to be first female MCA



Beatrice Kerubo

When Beatrice Kerubo Makwae decided to vie for the Member of County Assembly position in the 2022 General Election, there were sceptics and not many people thought she would triumph.

However, when the results were finally announced, Kerubo won, becoming the first woman to win the seat and the only woman holding an elective seat in Gusii land.

“I am the first woman to be elected as a Member of the County Assembly in Bombaba Borabu ward, Bomachoge Borabu Constituency, Kisii County having previously vied twice without much success. However, in 2022

things worked out in my favour.”

Kerubo contested for the same position in 2013 and 2017 and lost. “In my first attempt, I lost by only 50 votes. I had vied on the Restore and Build Kenya political party ticket.”

In her second attempt, she vied using a political party that was not popular in the region. However, a lot has changed since then as political parties are no longer the main determinants to winning an election.

“Times are changing and we are seeing people win elections as independent candidates.”

During the 2022 General Election, although she wanted to

vie on the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party ticket; the party gave a direct ticket to her opponent. At first I was disappointed because I did not want to vie as an independent candidate. I opted to remain in the party because it is still very hard to win an election in Kenya if you are not in the most popular political party.”

But as fate would have it, the man who was given the direct ticket was murdered in cold blood in a family dispute. “In a twist of events, ODM came looking for me. They handed the certificate to me.”

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

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

Innovative Strategies

To win this seat, Kerubo devised strategies to clinch the position. First she had to find the right party to contest in. Next she had to initiate development projects that would draw the community to her. Her philanthropic work targeted people in the community and this won hearts and helped to build her political profile.

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<<FROM PAGE 13 Kerubo's ability to interact with everyone, regardless of their status, endeared her to the electorate. "I received support from everyone in my ward – men, women and the youth. I had teams of volunteers, mainly women and the youth, who traversed the ward to garner support for my candidature."

Her campaigns were well organised. "I went to each polling station and would nominate 20 people. I told them to mobilise people to vote for me. I also had an advisory committee with representation from every polling station who advised me on what to do."

The team used Kerubo's manifesto to sell her agenda in every corner of the ward. It spelt out her plans to empower women, the youth, and people living with disability. Her other agenda was to help improve school infrastructure, roads, and addressing the rampant water problem.

Unlike her male counterparts who did their campaigns dead in the night, Kerubo's door-to-door campaigns began at 5:00 am every day. This enabled reach more people and popularise her candidature. She also attended many meetings including funerals to address voters. But most of the time she would take advantage of forums organized by the governor to popularise her candidature.

Her strategy to work with the church also paid off. The overwhelming support she received from them not only helped to enhance her chances of winning but also reduced incidences of humiliation from her opponents. "I am Deaconess and a treasurer of the SDA church which unanimously endorsed

my candidature in all church gatherings."

Challenging times

Even as she enjoyed the support of the church, Makwae had her share of challenges. She lost her husband in 2020, and her opponents used her status as a widow to warn voters that she would remarry immediately after winning the elections.

"They also looked for a man in the ward and urged him to



Most women lose election at the nomination level due to dishonest acts at that point. This can change with adequate sensitisation. Women candidates also need to know early enough if the political party is going to be supportive."

BEATRICE KERUBO, MCA
BOMBABA BORABU WARD



marry me. My opponents spread unfounded propaganda and rumours about me, organising people to heckle me whenever I addressed a public gathering. It was very disappointing but I chose to soldier on."

Kerubo fought political hooliganism but fortunately, the political party and supporters walked with her.

"My supporters donated to my campaign kitty, while ODM's policy to charge female aspirants half of the fee for party candidates was helpful. Election campaigns are very expensive and I had no choice but to work with what I had."

Learning from difficult situations

It's through the difficult situations that Kerubo gained useful insights into political issues. She realised that it was important resonate with the people. She had to package herself as a mother and majority of the people including the youth fondly call her 'Madhe', slung for mother.

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

One of the greatest challenges women face is lack of support from political parties. "Political party tickets are important, as it is difficult to sail through as an independent candidate. For any serious contender, being in a political party propels you."

"Most women lose election at the nomination level due to dishonest acts at that point. This can change with adequate sensitisation. Women candidates also need to know early enough if the political party is going to be supportive."

For the 2027 elections, Kerubo wants the Independent Elections and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to engage in intense voter education since many voters are cheated on how to mark the ballot paper.

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For Karen Magara, politics is about being smart



Karen Magara

Karen Magara's entry into Kisii politics was dramatic: she declared interest in the South Mugirango parliamentary seat, Kisii County, but dropped out even before she could get onto the ballot. Reason: to support her late brother Enock Magara who was vying for the same seat.

"I decided to support him and became his campaign manager. The electorate then, was yearning for change in leadership and my brother won with a landslide. Sadly, he later died in a road accident in 2000 and this paved way for a by-election."

"Most people insisted I take over from him because I shared in his agenda for the constituency. However, my other brother Omingo Magara who was working for Kenya Revenue Authority

decided to go for the seat."

He won the by-election and became the MP. Come 2002, Karen relocated to Nairobi and decided to vie for the Makadara parliamentary seat on a Ford Asili ticket. She lost to Reuben Ndolo but did not give up. In 2007, she contested for the South Mugirango again seat but lost.

In the 2013 General Election, Magara changed strategy and decided to support women who were running for political seats. This is the very strategy she applied in the 2017 elections. "I looked for a strong candidate who I could support and in return they would give me a nomination.

I joined Manson Oyongo Nyamweya who was vying for gubernatorial seat on a Kenya

National Congress Party. I was in charge of his campaign secretariat and that is how I managed to get a nomination to the Kisii County Assembly."

At the Assembly, she was instrumental in pushing for the rights of nominated Members of County Assembly (MCAs). "In Kisii County, for instance, a motion was crafted to deny the 24 women nominated in the Assembly their voting rights. We did not belong to any committees and some of us could not understand what we were doing in the Assembly. I pushed for the formation of the women's political caucus to agitate for our welfare.

"Although the Salaries and Remuneration Commission allocated both elected and nominated MCAs

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<<FROM PAGE 16 funds to run their offices, nominated members were not getting anything. The County Assembly Speaker instead decided to increase emoluments to the elected MCAs”

That is when, the chair the Women’s Caucus in Kisii County Assembly moved to court to challenge the decision. “The court ruled in our favour but the Assembly refused to comply with the ruling.”

Magara did not give up the fight. In 2020, she mobilized 15 female nominated MCAs to protest in the Assembly. However, they were denied access into the Assembly due to the Corona Virus pandemic rules. “I forced myself into the assembly, a scuffle ensued and I was beaten up and thrown out of its precincts.”

This saw her being suspended from the Assembly for a period of six months by the Powers and Privileges Committee. The suspension was a blessing in disguise as Magara used the time to reach out to key institutions to complain about what was happening at the County.

“I visited the Controller of Budget, the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), and the Kenya Human Rights, who later visited the county to push for our rights. The Controller of Budget halted all monies going to the 47 counties that was marked as office operations. This was my main achievement as a nominated MCA. Today all MCAs enjoy similar benefits and nominated members are allowed to contribute in the assembly.”

Another win for Magara was in 2022 when her efforts to campaign for candidates vying on the People’s Democratic Movement

(PDP) paid off. She was handed her second nomination as an MCA to the current Assembly where she chairs the Welfare Committee.

Women who occupy senior positions within political parties are in powerful position to get nominations or win seats. Such women are also able to support other women to get party tickets.”

KAREN MAGARA

These wins have not come on a bed of roses. She has been subjected to physical and emotional violence, sometimes by very close family members. “Politics is not for the faint hearted, the fiasco during the campaigns wore me out.”

Magara believes that such violence combined with voter buying and back stabbing are the biggest impediments to women vying for political office. However, she encourages women not to give up. “There is no fair play ground in the political arena and women not only face violence but are denied party tickets in favour of their male opponents.”

Sources of useful lessons

These experiences remain a source of useful lessons. One of the lessons Magara has learnt in her political career is to be strategic. “As a woman politician, you need to work smart, it is not about how

much money you invest; but you have to align yourself with strong political parties to win elective seats.”

Her experiences also taught her that women seeking party nominations can go for smaller parties. “But if you want to win a parliamentary seat, you must belong to a strong party. You must align yourself with political party diehards who can help you secure party tickets.”

However, this can only happen if women position themselves strategically within political parties. “Women who occupy senior positions within political parties are in powerful position to get nominations or win seats. Such women are also able to support other women to get party tickets.”

She notes that political parties such as ODM have devolved their functions and issuance of party tickets to the county level. “In Kisii County for instance, the Governor will be critical. Women need to start embracing party politics because that is where major decisions are made that directly affect the number of women to be elected.

“The only challenge is that very few women are vying for seats. During the 2022 General Election, a ward like Etago Borabu did not have a single woman candidate. About 34 men vied for the seat and definitely a man won the seat.

“One way to get more women vying for political positions is for them to pursue leadership exchange programmes. Let us have counties that have embraced women leadership like Nakuru County come and talk to our women in Kisii where women do not believe that fellow women can lead.”

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