

# SautiSasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

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UN WOMEN



**Pushing the  
boundaries of  
leadership**



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# The sky is the limit for Kajiado CEC Member



Janet Serenei, the Kajiado County Executive Committee (CEC) member in charge Gender, Social Services, Culture, Tourism and Wildlife.

BY AWC FEATURE SERVICE

In a remote village in Maasai land where going to school and rising to a leadership position for women is a tall order; one woman has defied the odds to emerge as a role model to many young girls.

Meet Janet Serenei, the Kajiado County Executive Committee (CEC) member in charge Gender, Social Services, Culture, Tourism and Wildlife. To many, Serenei has treaded and emerged successful where very few women in the pastoral community dare to venture.

She began her leadership journey way back in 1995 when she was posted as a P1 teacher in a remote school in Magadi Division, Kajiado County. The posting was a blessing in disguise.

“This was a boarding school started by the World Bank to ensure children from pastoral communities were able to access education without having to tag along their parents who moved from one place to another in search of pasture for their animals.”

“I took up my position with pride. Despite the challenges, I was able to transform the school to become a centre of excellence.”

With this posting, her journey in leadership had begun. From the classroom, she rose to become the headteacher of the school. This elevation positioned her to serve in the giant Kenya National Union Teachers, representing Magadi teachers.

A holder of a Masters Degree in global business and sustainability, Serenei was already a household name when she resigned from

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her teaching job in 2013 to join the Kajiado County Government.

“I managed to secure a job as the Ngong Sub County administrator. It is while serving in this position my work became even more visible.”

As the Ngong Administrator, Serenei was able to streamline service delivery to enviable standards. “I worked with the youth, business community to deliver what was expected of me. We gave the Sub County a facelift including building ultramodern facilities among them a market which serves the residents to date.”

In 2017, the County Government recognized her transformative approach to work efforts by promoting her to the position of a Director of Revenue in charge of User Fee. “When I came in, we beat other sub-counties, with our revenue collection rising to Ksh1.2billion, and in the process surpassing our target.

Come the 2022 general elections, she was tasked with the responsibility of consolidating the Governor’s support base in Magadi ward. “I worked with students and parents and was able to deliver the votes during the elections.

Her efforts bore fruits. She is now in his government, serving as the CEC in charge of Gender, Social Services, Culture and Tourism. Although this position turned out to be the most eventful and challenging, she does her work with a lot of zeal and pride.

And this is evident in the strides her unit is making: she has been able to push for increased allocation of funds in her docket. “We already have a gender mainstreaming policy that has established a



Ksh 40 million kitty for women economic empowerment. This is a revolving, interest free fund, whose proceeds will be distributed equally across all Wards to benefit women entrepreneurs.”

“We are currently forming ward committees to oversee the work of the Fund. The women will propose their projects depending on where and what they feel best suits them. Those in areas with good agricultural soil can engage in agri business to boost their livelihoods.”

Through her docket, the county is working with the Ministry of Agriculture to do climate smart projects with women groups. The idea is to help the women diversify their sources of livelihood by embracing change, changing mindsets, and trying new things; even as they rear goats for domestic and commercial purposes.

Serenei says that they are currently doing a lot of capacity building for the women and mentorship for the youth on matters related to income generation.

**Getting the CEC position**

Securing this decision-making position was not a walk in the park

for Serenei. She believes her track record both as a teacher and a senior county official gave her an edge over other candidates who were seeking to be appointed for the same position. She enumerates a few of them.

As a teacher, she recalls she was able to transform many schools into centres of excellence. “At Naning’oi Girls Boarding School in Mosiro where I was posted as a headteacher, I was able to improve the school’s means score in National examinations.”

She was also instrumental in championing for girl child education and denouncing child marriages. Her efforts saw the numbers of girls who were dropping out of school due to teenage pregnancies and early marriages come down.

She linked these girls with many organizations that were supporting girl child education such as the Masai girls’ education fund. “It is through this initiative that I was able to champion for the enrolment of more girls in schools and increase their retention levels.

Her other successes include her contribution to the establishment



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of Paterson Memorial Secondary school where she served as the Parent-Teachers- Association (PTA) treasurer.

Another achievement is her instrumental role in the formation of Magadi Integrated Development pastoralist programme that brought together all the NGOs working in Magadi. "I came in as a chair representing the community. I was involved in planning the activities for the NGOs in Magadi especially those supporting education and water projects to avoid duplication of projects.

**Challenging times**

Her enviable achievements have not been free of challenges. "It is through tough times that you become hardened and initiate change. According to the Serenei, she comes from a patriarchal society that does not believe in women leadership. "Women have to work twice as hard to break the glass ceiling and gain acceptance as leaders."

Her appointment as a CEC was another challenge. "I had the required credentials and had demonstrated my abilities as the Director of Revenue in charge of User fee in Kajiado Central. Yet, I faced a lot of backlash when my name was proposed for the Trade docket. There were a lot of political intrigues and infightings and my name had to be dropped for the trade docket. It was reintroduced again in the County Assembly to take up as the CEC in charge of Gender, Social Services, Culture, Tourism and Wildlife."

Serenei says that women in the county have for decades remained under represented with the highest decision-making organs. There is only a negligible

representation of women in such positions.

"One of the struggles for women in Kajiado County has been access to political leadership and decision-making positions. Currently, all women in the county assembly have been nominated and no single woman was elected. We only have two women CECs."



**"One of the struggles for women in Kajiado County has been access to political leadership and decision-making positions.**

JANET SERENEI, THE KAJIADO COUNTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC) MEMBER IN CHARGE GENDER, SOCIAL SERVICES, CULTURE, TOURISM AND WILDLIFE.



**It is a journey of useful lessons**

Serenei is however optimistic about the future of women leadership given the useful lessons she has picked on her leadership journey. "The women need a lot of capacity building because the constitution has a good framework which, if fully exploited, can propel more women to leadership positions."

But she notes that women must excel in their respective positions to showcase the value women bring to leadership.

"Women can either build or break themselves. I always tell

myself the difference between success and failure is in your hands as an individual. The motivation to succeed is inside you and you can choose to deliver or not to."

She is ranked among the highly performing CECs in the county government of Kajiado. "I first championed for increased budgetary allocations to steer my mandate. Today, this is one of the best ministries in Kajiado County."

Her Ministry is currently working with the Ministry of foreign Affairs to develop the tourism circuits in Kajiado County. "I have formed the Kajiado County tourism working group that brings on board all the conservationists and NGOs in the County so that we can map out our products and see how we can better promote them to earn the county revenue and visibility."

She says for women like her to succeed; they need to rope in men in the gender agenda. This will help to expand the leadership space for women.

"We need to embrace the men to champion the women's agenda. This is how they will stop seeing women as threats but as equal partners to make the world a better a place for everybody.

Serenei says when women stand out, the men begin to embrace them. "I have seen my male colleagues pushing me to scale the heights."

She is emphatic that young women seeking leadership positions should believe that they have everything they need to ascend to whatever position they desire.

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# Nominated MCA a beacon of hope for women with disability

BY AWC FEATURES

**B**etty Taany Mula's interaction with persons with disability in Kajiado County brought her face to face with the harsh realities they had to endure.

Many of those she met were grappling with a myriad of challenges that ranged from stigmatization, lack of official recognition by appropriate authorities, to failure to access basic services such as education and health. Their poor living conditions were also deplorable.

It is this agonizing state of affairs that made her to start programmes to empower persons with disability. As she did this, her leadership and passion to improve the lives of those with disabilities like her started to attract the attention of many people.

The political class too, took notice of her good work. She was rewarded with a nomination as Member of County Assembly (MCA), Kajiado County, to represent people with special needs.

Mula's nomination did not come out of the blue. For many years, she had emerged as a voice of the voiceless, speaking for the disabled in the county at every opportunity that presented to her, including in key county government forums.

She also realized that working closely with the political class was going to help put issues of people with disability high on the agenda



**Betty Taany Mula, a nominated Member of County Assembly (MCA), Kajiado County.**

of the county government issues that were under consideration. "I had to participate in the political Party programs to be recognized, heard, and appreciated." In return, the United Democratic Alliance Party nominated her in recognition of her contribution to

the community, which included the registration by appropriate authorities, dozens of persons with disability in the county.

This nomination presented Mula with the opportunity to advance the rights of people with disability



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and other marginalized groups in the County's highest decision-making organ, the Assembly. So far, she has managed to push for the adoption of the Kajiado County Disability Mainstreaming Act which establishes a Ksh 50 million revolving fund.

The Fund is expected to provide soft loans to people living with disability to start income generating ventures.

"Persons with disabilities have been misused and abused. Some are used in begging schemes designed by other people who take advantage of their conditions to receive money from the unsuspecting public. This is going to change," says Mula.

According to her, the Act establishes a board that will guide and oversee how the Fund is applied to do many interventions. These include: Financing start-up businesses for PWDs, establishing PWDs micro and small enterprises, facilitating training, mentorship and the provision of business development services to persons with disabilities in the county.

In addition, the board has powers to use the monies to buy assistive devices for PWDs, and support education programmes including offering bursaries to persons with disabilities. The Board will further facilitate the provision of medical services to PWDs including nutritional support, among others.

Once the Fund becomes fully operational, notes Mula, it will facilitate PWDs to sell their products and earn a living.

With the Fund established, Mula has now trained her eyes on collaborating with other leaders in her Ward and County to help identify and nurture talents among the PWDs. This is designed

to help them use their talents to better their lives and that of others.

In leadership matters, she has been working closely with other women with disability to take up leadership roles and engage in governance processes. During the 2022 general elections, for instance, she worked very closely with these women to ensure they participated in the electoral process.



**Persons with disabilities have been misused and abused. Some are used in begging schemes designed by other people who take advantage of their conditions to receive money from the unsuspecting public. This is going to change.**



"This was done during the 2022 electioneering period where we invited aspirants vying for various political positions to come to our forums and speak to us. As we did this, the public showed a lot of interest and appreciated what women with disabilities can do. This helped to build confidence in them to consider us capable leaders."

Mula journey's to get PWD to be recognized has not been easy. The expectations on her are too high that she has to work triple hard to deliver.

She also recalls that during the nomination, her name was removed from the party list and she had to fight for the slot. She had to present her disability card for her nomination to be restored.

Such happenings and many other experiences have offered her with useful lessons that continue to guide her on how to engage in the political space.

Her experiences, she notes, have made her learn that women need to play smart at the political party level to succeed in politics.

"You might work hard and get nothing. You need to be known by the party leadership at the local level and abide by the party rules."

To succeed in leadership, she emphasizes, a woman leader needs to implement programmes that have the ability to change people's lives.

But that is not enough. Mula advises women, especially young ones interested in politics, to join political parties as members; participate in party activities and seek leadership positions in the party at their local level.

"Let the party know what they want as women leaders through seeking audience with the party leadership."

Such an approach, she says, helps to ensure whenever opportunities arise in the party, including nominations to political positions, the slots are distributed equally. At the political party level, she advises women with disability to identify themselves with political parties and make themselves visible in such structures for the political leadership and the society to take note of them and the value they bring to leadership.

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Kenya Editors Guild President, Zubedah Kananu addressing Editors on the two thirds gender rule. Looking on is Daisy Amdany.

# Group vows to push for the implementation of the two thirds gender rule

BY FAITH MUIRURI

A couple of months ago, the Multi-Sectoral Working Group (MSWG) established by the Ministry of Gender, Culture, The Arts and Heritage published a report proposing a clear framework and formula on how to realize the not more than two-thirds gender principle.

Sadly, the proposal is yet to get the full force of the law to activate its operationalization. According to the MSWG co-chairperson,

Daisy Amdany, they plan to use numerous engagements and strategies to push for the implementation of the two thirds gender rule. The latter will create a more inclusive and diverse governance structure that reflects the composition of the population.

It is this inclusive governance structure that the MSWG report proposes. The “not more than two-thirds Gender Principle” is a Constitutional provision that seeks to ensure that neither gender occupies more than two-thirds of seats in elective or appointive

positions in public institutions. The rationale behind this principle is to advance gender equality and address historical imbalances in political representation and other decision making positions.

The MSWG on the realisation of the not more than two-thirds gender principle was established vide Gazette Notices No. 10848 and No. 11090 published on August 15 and August 25, 2023, respectively.

It was tasked to develop and recommend a framework for the implementation of the not more

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than two-thirds gender principle as captured in Articles 27(6) and (7) as well as 81(b) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Key highlights from the report by the MSWG include proposed legal, policy and administrative amendments which, if implemented, will help bridge the gender gap that continues to define Kenyas political landscape.

Speaking during the gender sector working group in a Nairobi hotel, Amdany outlined a raft of proposals listed in the report, key among them being an amendment to Article 90 of the Constitution to accommodate proposals to amend Articles 97 and 98.

“The amendment of Article 97 will pave way for a formula to nominate additional special seat members of the National Assembly to bridge any gender gaps that may arise after the declaration of results following a General Election. We are simply adopting gender top ups currently implemented at the county level to help ensure that the National Assembly conforms to the constitutional principle,” she said.

The proposed amendment of Article 98 speaks to the composition in the Senate. The Multi sectoral working group has further proposed a transitional clause in Article 98A to enable the current Parliament to conform with the requirements of Article 81(b).

According to the report, a Bill will have to be formulated to amend Article 90 to give room for additional special seats in

the National Assembly and Senate based on proportional representation by use of party lists.

In addition, the report recommends amendments to the Election Act specifically Sections 31, 35A and 36.



**The amendment of Article 97 will pave way for a formula to nominate additional special seat members of the National Assembly to bridge any gender gaps that may arise after the declaration of results following a General Election.**

—DAISY AMDANY



The amendments to these sections seeks to provide that a political party is mandated to ensure that the names of the party candidates submitted to the electoral body in a General Election for parliamentary and county elections comply with the principle that not more than two-thirds of those proposed shall be of the same gender.

Amdany says that if the amendment sails through, IEBC will automatically reject all parties that do not abide by this principle.

“We have proposed an amendment to the Elections Act to require all political parties participating in elections to ensure

that the list they submit for their candidates meet the two thirds gender principle. While we make the recommendations, we are not dictating to them how they should do it. But at the end, we are saying IEBC should reject all parties that do not abide by this principle.”

This will enhance the participation and inclusion of women in political processes. “If you look today at the number of women that we have in parliament including governors, majority have been elected in their respective political party strongholds. We have regions in this country that if you win the nomination by a certain party, you are as good as elected. What we are saying is that political parties need to prioritize the nomination of women as candidates for those [political] seats.”

The report by the MSWG also recommends the amendment of the Political Parties Act to provide for the establishment of Women Inclusion and Political Participation Fund for purposes of financing education and training, mentorship and capacity building, including support for women seeking elective positions.

“We have proposed a Fund to be admnistrated through the office of the Registrar of Political Parties to support women who will be running for public office.”

Amdany is emphatic that the implementation of the two thirds gender rule holds the key to changing the entire spectrum of economic empowerment, peace and security in the country.

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# The secrets of remaining relevant in the political space



Grace Nkonene Parantai, nominated MCA, Kajiado County Assembly.

## BY FAITH MUIRURI

In 2014, Grace Nkonene Parantai found herself at the heart of a heated political campaign not as a candidate; but a main campaigner for her husband who was seeking a Senate seat to represent Kajiado County.

Parantai, who had been nominated twice to the Kajiado County assembly, had what it takes to help propel her husband to a political position. The Wiper Party,

which she and her husband were campaigning for, was watching her contribution. Her husband lost in his bid, but her efforts did not go to waste.

“I was lucky to be nominated by the same party as a Member of County Assembly (MCA), Kajiado County. I have never looked back. At the Assembly, I was listed among the best performing MCAs for my remarkable contribution to debates in the house.”

A former teacher, Parantai is credited for introducing several

motions among them a motion on establishment of lactation stations in the county.

To her Wiper political party, she is an asset, having helped the party to win votes and elective seats in the assembly in the 2013 General Elections.

“I was able to deliver elective seats for the party even in very difficult moments. This gave me a lot of visibility.” Come the 2022 General Elections, she did the same. Again, the party rewarded her with a second nomination to the Kajiado

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County Assembly.

Parantai credits her success to hard work, oratory skills and firmness. Her good work in the Assembly has seen her elected the chair of the women MCAs political caucus.

**Remaining relevant in political spaces**

How has she managed to remain relevant in highly competitive political spaces? Parantai credits this to the strategies she has used to sell herself as an asset in this space. One of them is being actively involved in activities and programmes run by the party.

“Unlike most people who appear during an electioneering period, I have always been a great asset to the party, writing proposals, negotiating on behalf of the party, and bringing new ideas when needed.”

She was instrumental in crafting the Wiper Party Women’s Charter which helped to increase the visibility of women within and outside the Party. “I managed to lobby the Party to increase the number of women delegates to the Party National Delegates Conference by apportioning two slots per constituency for the Wiper Women Democrats.”

These successes in the political party spaces have come with their share of challenges. She is constantly

trying to balance time for her family and political demands. She says she hardly find good time with her family, especially during intense political campaigns.

“One is lost in a sea of responsibility and events,” she says, adding that though life as an MCA is hectic; she is trying very hard to balance between family and work. And she is now enjoying it.

She says that Kajiado County is still very patriarchal and as a woman, she has to work harder than her male counterparts and endure insults to prove herself as a capable leader. “In cases where my ideas are overlooked, I have learnt to find other innovative ways to pitch them so that they are accepted.

It is this sterling performance by her and other women in the Assembly that has now attracted media attention. Initially, the media overlooked contributions of women MCAs and focused only on the male political heavyweights. “But women MCAs have come together and tabled several powerful motions and bills which have increased media interest in what we do, and in the process increased visibility of women MCAs.”

These impressive performances have emboldened her: she now plans to run for an elective seat in the 2027 General Elections. Parantai feels that other

women who are transforming societies should join her and claim their space in all spheres of leadership.

“Women need to forge ahead with their aspirations and should not relent because they understand most problems facing their communities.”

During her six years in politics, Parantai has learnt to seize opportunities that come her way. “When an opportunity comes, take it, do not hold back even for a single minute. The best opportunity that comes your way will never come again. I realized if you are already at the decision-making table, you are much better than when you are outside. When negotiations are done, you are likely to be considered.”

She is however dismayed that in most cases, women refuse to seize the moment even in situations where provisions for affirmative action are clear. “When a chance comes, just take it. Take it in the form it is. When you are in there, you can be able to navigate your way.”

Her advice to fellow women leaders or those seeking leadership positions is to remain focused on their agenda. “People will say many things to distract you, but you must learn how to handle them. Learn how to handle the media, remain true to your course, and avoid their diversionary tactics.”

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# Samburu women turn climate change misery into opportunity



Lillian Letiwa colleagues in one of the Tree Nurseries around Kirisia Forest in Samburu County.

## BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

**W**omen in Samburu County are a distraught lot: The prolonged drought and severe floods have combined to make their lives a living misery.

“Climate change has not been kind to us. The drought left death of animals and crops in its wake; with the little that was remaining being swept away with the floods that followed the drought,” says Lillian Letiwa, one of the women reeling from the effects of climate change.

It is these devastating effects that mobilized women to take leadership in addressing the effects of climate change on their livelihoods. Letiwa and other women came together and initiated projects to help them mitigate the effects of climate change.

One such project was the establishment of tree nurseries in the Ngari area, overlooking Mararal town, Samburu County. The results of their efforts are visible in the lush bushes and tall trees that abound in the areas where the women are undertaking their climate change action.

Known as Ngari Women Tree and Nurseries project, the group has membership of over 100 women. For over 10 years, the group has been on the fore-front coming up with practical initiatives to mitigate climate change.

Lillian Letiwa, founder of the project says that rather than being passive victims of climate change, the group took up an active role as change agents. She wanted women to be in the leadership spaces on matters related to climate change.

The idea to start the group was mooted at her homestead where she introduced the women to plant seedlings of **PAGE>>12**



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indigenous trees and fruits as part of their income generating activity.

“I started this project because I am passionate about the environment,” says Letiwa. The women bought into the idea, prompting Letiwa to seek support from the government.

“I approached our Chief and asked for land to plant trees. He agreed to facilitate us to access a piece of land, which we used to start our tree project.”

The women are now able to pay schools fees and feed their families, thanks to the proceeds from selling the tree seedlings.

To expand their influence, the women became members of Kisiria Conservancy Association (KCA), a local community initiative supported by the government to conserve Kisiria Forest, which covers 92,000 hectares.

According to Letiwa, being a member of the association was strategic because it exposed them to more opportunities to sell their products; to work with the larger community to use locally led sustainable conservation, management, and restoration approaches to mitigate climate change.

In addition to trading in tree seedlings, Letiwa’s group is also engaged in bee keeping as another source of income and a strategy to mitigate effects of climate change on their lives. In fact, beekeeping has seen many women appreciate the value of trees since the bees need trees to make honey. Hence, the women are now attaching greater value to environmental conservation since they are able to link it to greater benefits.

For Letiwa, she uses the modern beehives, particularly the Longstroth, for her honey making business. She says unlike the traditional beehives, the modern ones are manageable and easy to maintain because they yield cleaner honey. This is because their design ensures honey does not mix with larvae.



**Climate change has not been kind to us. The drought left death of animals and crops in its wake; with the little that was remaining being swept away with the floods that followed the drought.**

—LILLIAN LETIWA



She notes, with a broad smile: “beekeeping is a white-collar job. I spent less time taking care of them, but get good harvest. Bees do not demand for feeds or vaccines, making them easier to maintain hence very profitable.”

Letiwa has over 100 beehives. On average, she gets 150 kilogram of honey from harvesting 10 hives at any given time. Each beehive offers between 15 kg to 20 kgs. One kilo of honey goes for Ksh500.

In recent years, demand for honey has been on the rise, especially in the urban areas of Samburu and beyond. This is

turning out to be a blessing for many women engaged in bee business such as Letiwa.

Another income generating activity the women in Samburu have adopted as they adapt to climate change is the making of smokeless charcoal briquettes. Letiwa says they use a mixture of charcoal dust, soil and water to mould and make these briquettes.

“We are using a simple mixture of charcoal dust, soil and water. We just mix, bind and mould it and make charcoal briquettes. Women have mastered the art,” says Antonnella Leshore.

The proceeds arising from selling the briquettes is kept in the women’s savings account, whose interest they later share equally to help them cater for expenses; including school fees and food.

“About 100 women in this initiative have benefited from the savings account interest,” says Letiwa.

“This has seen more women getting economically empowered and reducing cases of gender-based violence. Women are able to make their own decision on how to deal with abusive relationships.”

Despite the successes, Letiwa is worried that many women are yet to understand how best to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

To achieve greater results and reach the unreached women, Letiwa wants the county government of Samburu to partner with Ngari Women Group to co-create solutions for the larger county.

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Rebecca S. Lolosoli, nominated MCA Ewuaso Ward Samburu County.

# Lolosoli: How resilience earned me a political position

BY RUTH OMKHANGO

Coming from a community that pursues cultural practices that disempower women socially, politically, and economically, the success of Rebecca Lolosoli in the political space is commendable.

At 62-year-old, Lolosoli radiates hope and symbolizes the unrelenting spirit of Samburu women to fight for social, political, and economic emancipation. She says her many years of struggle are geared towards contributing to a transformed Samburu County

where women and girls' rights are respected and negative cultural practices are a thing of the past.

Her fight for justice has seen her previously serve as the chairperson for her local chapter of Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization. She has also been invited to conferences on women and human rights in the USA, South Africa and Europe; exposure she credits to raising her profile and that of Samburu women.

For decades, she has tried unsuccessfully to win a political seat and influence decisions on women wellbeing from where it

matters. In 2022, things changed in her favour: she was nominated as a Member of County Assembly, Samburu County.

"Samburu women and girls have suffered for many years. I wanted to become their voice to bring dignity to their lives," says Lolosoli. "I am in this leadership position to selflessly lead from the front in changing their lives."

Her journey into leadership and fight for women and girls rights dates back to the late 1980's. In 1990, she and other 14 like-minded women established Umoja Uaso Village to provide **PAGE>>14**



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refugee for women and girls survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

“We took a bold move to establish Umoja Village which allows only women and their children to live in. Men are not allowed to come in and see them once they seek refuge in the village,” says Lolosoli.

The village supports women and girls, orphans and widows, especially those who are facing social and economic difficulties; had been abandoned by their families, are fleeing domestic violence, forced marriage or female genital mutilation (FGM).

According to Lolosoli, the village currently accommodates over 50 families of women and girls established a school with the support from development partners. The school, Umoja Muehlbauer Academy, caters for over 300 children.

The group went further to challenge the cultural edict that forbids women from owning land. In 2019, they applied for a title deed for the land where the village sits. In 2021, their dream came true when they were issued with a title deed by the county government of Samburu.

Their work and these successes have not pleased some people. The women say they experience threats and attacks from men of neighbouring villages, who are unhappy with the women and girl empowerment programmes the Village is pursuing.

It is these attacks and other challenges that prompted Lolosoli to venture into politics so as to be

in a vantage position to access resources and have influence to advance the aspiration of Samburu women and girls.

“I first vied for a seat as Member of County Assembly in 2013 together with my husband who was also vying for the same position. But he defeated me because he was in the most popular party.”

She also believes she lost because her own family argued it was against their culture for her to vie against her husband. They decided to support him.

**“I criss-crossed the vast Samburu County supporting candidates under the party, and this earned me dividends by being nominated for the Member of County Assembly ,”**

REBECCA LOLOSOLI

In the 2017 General Elections, she vied for the Member of Parliament Seat but the community challenged her to go for the County Women Representative seat. She refused and paid the price with a loss.

With such a result, she knew it was time to change strategy. So come 2022 General Elections, she did not vie for any elective position, but choose to campaign for the popular party in the county, the

United Democratic Alliance (UDA) and all the candidates vying under the party.

“I criss-crossed the vast Samburu County supporting candidates under the party, and this earned me dividends by being nominated for the Member of County Assembly ,”

Lolosoli says her position as MCA has been an eye opener as she currently sits on strategic committees which include: Delegated County Legislature committee and Co-operatives Development, Trade and Tourism committee.

Her success in the political space speaks to her resilience. To her, one of the greatest lesson she has learnt is not to give up

“I have learnt that nobody will give you space unless you fight for it. It is even worse in a patriarchal society such as ours. The secret is to keep knocking at that door.”

From where she sits, education remains the greatest equalizer for Samburu women and girls. “There needs to be a deliberate need to support women and girls beginning with education as an entry point. Education will be key to empowering the Samburu woman.”

It is this education that will give women opportunities like those she is enjoying now. “My dreams in politics are even bigger since I have been empowered. In the 2027 general elections, I am going for an elective position.”

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# END FEMICIDE IN KENYA



## Being a woman no longer safe in Kenya

BY EVA MUNYUA.

The past couple of weeks have been very troubling for many women in Kenya with the retrieval of over a dozen decapitated bodies of women stuffed in sacks from a quarry in Eastlands of Nairobi. Although the motive of these killings is yet to be known, one thing is clear; Kenyan women are paying a heavy price just because of their gender.

These cases have been rising in recent months and years. The story of Rita Waeni and many other women are a testimony to this. Rita, who was a student at JKUAT, had gone out to meet a stranger she had met on Instagram. She never came back. Her dismembered remains were discovered in a rubbish pit in a rental apartment in Nairobi.

The government pathologist said that Waeni was strangled before

her body was decapitated. Despite CCTV footages that showed the suspects of the gruesome murder, they were all released from police custody due to lack of evidence.

Rita is among many of the victims of femicide in Kenya. Statistics released by National Crime Kenya reveals that at least 40 percent of Kenyan women aged 15-49 experience violence at least once in their lives.

In 2023, at least 153 cases of femicide were reported and have continued to rise with gender activists calling for action to address the vice. However, statistics on femicide are difficult to ascertain due to factors like underreporting, inadequate data collection and normalization of violence against women.

According to Femicide Count, Kenya alone reported 28 cases in one month. The report states that 75 percent of the murderers were persons known to the victims who include intimate partners, relatives and friends, with only 15 percent being strangers.

"Femicide has thrived in Kenya because the society has normalized domestic violence and tolerance to abusive partners. Notably, men blame women and criminalize them for being victims supported by the deep-seated misogynistic culture and cultural norms that elevate toxic masculinity in the society," says Femicide Count.

But what has the government done to protect women from this heinous violence? So far, the government has committed to ending gender-based violence (GBV) by 2026 as part of its global commitment through Generation Equality's Action plan. However, nothing much seems to be happening.

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The UN Women Kenya representative, Annah Mutavati observed, “shockingly, with all the laws, commitments, policies, and promising practices, violence against women and girls remains rampant.”

Recently, a group of Gender activists organized protests to end femicide, carrying placards that read: “we are human beings, stop killing us!”

The protests, led by FIDA-Kenya, called for justice for the victims of femicide with the Vice chairperson Christine Kung’u lamenting about the state failure to protect Kenyan women and girls.

“The government does not collect data on women murders, and that government policies remain sluggish and ineffective despite the policies in place like CEDAW that calls for elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.”

Gender experts attribute this disturbing trend to factors such as domestic violence and normalization of violence. Personal motives also drive individuals to commit femicide. According to the experts, women’s dependency on their male counterparts and economic disempowerment, increase their vulnerability to violence and femicide.

“Women who lack economic opportunities are more likely to be trapped in abusive relationships and may find it difficult to leave due to financial constraints. Further, women who face violence and attempted femicide may face shame and stigma which may hold them back from getting help.

Power dynamics is also thought to be one of the reasons

contributing to increasing cases of femicide As women becomes more and more assertive, their perpetrators feel threatened and intimidated when such women challenge traditional gender roles and assert their autonomy.

**Femicide has thrived in Kenya because the society has normalized domestic violence and tolerance to abusive partners.**

FEMICIDE COUNT

Psychologists argue that societal norms that position men as dominant and women subordinate to men solidify the narrative that women deserve to be killed if they do not conform to patriarchal standards of gender performance.

The way women are portrayed in the media and other social platforms normalizes violence against women. Some public figures on social media platforms have contributed to normalization of toxic masculinity through tweets that show dominance and control of men over women therefore reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Data shows that women aged 18-40 years are the largest group of victims of femicide and justice for them is either delayed or denied. While there are several policies in place that address gender-

based violence in Kenya, several factors hinder their effective implementation.

Among these are the poor enforcement of laws that enable perpetrators to engage in femicide without facing legal consequences.

Corruption too is blamed for denying justice to victims of femicide. Perpetrators escape justice through bribery, manipulation of evidence and lack of accountability. Community resistance to challenge cultural norms and attitudes that justify violence against women also undermine efforts to address femicide.

Yet, femicide is an urgent crisis that demands an immediate action. According to the UN Women femicide report, one of the interventions to address this calamity is improving data systems and adopting relevant prevention and response strategies.

“Strengthening the existing legal and policy frameworks by building capacity of judicial systems to handle cases of Gender based violence and femicide,” says the UN agency.

The report also underscores the need to promote economic empowerment of women by expanding access to education and vocational training to increase their employment rates.

There is also need to provide comprehensive care and support services to survivors of violence including creating awareness to challenge existing cultural norms that elevate toxic masculinity.

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# Onyango: How I won the MCA seat as an independent candidate



Susan Akoth Onyango , the first woman Member of County Assembly in Gwasi South Ward.

## BY AWC FEATURES

**W**hen Susan Akoth Onyango vied for a political seat during the 2022 General Elections, she did not know she would be elected the first woman Member of County Assembly in Gwasi South Ward. To make it even sweet, she won as an independent candidate.

Onyango's win is a testimony of what determination and

resilience can achieve. Having lost during party nominations, she almost gave up. Her supporters encouraged her to vie as an independent candidate, a mission she thought would be impossible.

"I was reluctant to go as an independent candidate because I thought I would not defeat the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) candidate, whose party enjoyed massive following in the county."

Despite the strong political wave and running against 10 men, she defeated her closest rival with over 1,000 votes. She attributes her win to the trust and overwhelming support she got from her followers. "I have received immense support from the community and continue to receive congratulatory messages until today," says Onyango.

Popularly known as "Duasi" meaning lady with milk, Onyango believes her closeness and commitment in working for her community played a major role in her win.

"I am determined to deliver to prove to the community that they made the right choice to elect me as their representative. I want to sustain their trust," says Onyango.

Onyango's political journey began in 2013 when she enrolled as one of the campaigners of John Mbadi, the former Member of Parliament for Suba South Constituency and the current Cabinet Secretary for National Treasury. She was one of his treasurers during the political campaigns.

It is while campaigning for Mbadi, who she describes as her mentor, she was motivated to pursue politics as a career. In fact, she attributes her success to the strategies learned from him.

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She learnt that investing your time and commitment to a political party pays. In 2017, her service to the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party earned her nomination as a Member of County Assembly.

“I served the ODM party as chair in my ward and later became the treasurer for Suba Sub- County. This opportunity exposed me to the world of politics as I was able to network and learn from seasoned politicians in the county.”

But it was during her tenure as a nominated MCA that she decided to vie in the 2022 elections. “I realised the only way to make a difference in people’s lives is to have a mandate from the people, on whose behalf resources are allocated to the Ward. This is because only elected leaders who are allocated county resources to engage in development projects at their Ward level,”

Her decision to vie triggered other strategic decisions including setting up a small fund where she saved money to use during the campaigns. These savings became key for her given that she was running as an independent candidate unlike her opponents who were supported by their political parties.

According to Onyango, her main target during the campaign were the women who formed majority of voters in the ward. To access many of them, she followed them either in the markets or in their houses using her door-to-door campaign strategy.

“I was very sincere to the electorates and told them I did not

have sufficient resources but gave them hope and commitment to transform their lives.”

Also contributing to her win was her proper preparation of her agents. All her agents in the 37-polling station were trained on what was expected of them on the election day.



**I was very sincere to the electorates and told them I did not have sufficient resources but gave them hope and commitment to transform their lives.**

SUSAN AKOTH ONYANGO ,  
THE FIRST WOMAN MEMBER OF  
COUNTY ASSEMBLY IN GWASI  
SOUTH WARD.



“Being the only independent candidate, I overheard electorates saying that they must shame the party and elect me. This greatly motivated and encouraged me to go forward.”

Her highest moment was when she won the elections despite all the hurdles: “I received a lot of calls from the media. I was all over the local stations as well as in social media platform within Nyanza region people celebrating my win.”

The 2022 elections helped her acknowledge the power of the media. To work better with the media, she has now hired

professional media practitioners to manage her social media platforms as well as ensure publicity whenever she is launching her development projects.

Onyango is confident that the work she has done in the past one year has raised the education standards in her Ward, which includes awarding bursaries for over 1,200 students, with over 30 students having received full sponsorship in high school and tertiary institutions.

“Through partnership with Kenya Power, we have installed street lights throughout the ward to enhance security and promote business people to work until late in the night. Those who have benefited include women in markets.”

On access to water, her target is to ensure, by 2026, water is accessible to majority of the households, which will help eliminate the long-distances women have to travel in search of the commodity. So far, she has drilled six boreholes.

But she says such ambitious goals cannot be done by her alone. She is mentoring young women interested in politics to get in leadership positions, and help her to transform communities.

“I have special forums for women in the Ward, with about 75 per cent of my coordinators being females.” It is these coordinators who represent her to functions in the community, which she is unable to attend in person. For now, her focus is to “finish all my projects then I know what next in 2027 elections.”

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