

# SautiSasa

Promoting the rights and position of Kenyan women in decision making

ISSUE 6 , 2024



**Resilience in the face of adversity**



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# Women Council of Governors upbeat about the G7 Strategy



President Dr William Ruto and Machakos County Governor Wavinya Ndeti during the launch of the G7 Strategy. COURTESY: IDA MUMEITA, OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR, MACHAKOS COUNTY

**W**orried by their low numbers, the Council of Governors (CoG) women caucus launched an ambitious strategy aimed at increasing the number of female governors, from seven to 24.

The increase is expected to happen in the next elections. So far, the strategy has been activated in Machakos, Kirinyaga, and Kwale counties.

Known as G7 Strategy, the caucus has brought together seven female governors who have vowed to deliver on the spirit and

expectations of devolution. This will be done through five pillars: Socio-economic development, Political Strategy, Good governance, Accountability, Access to Justice and Institutional Strengthening.

According to CoG Chief Executive Officer Mary Mwiti, the move is aimed at realising two key results: Increasing the chances of re-election of the current female governors; and getting more women elected as governors. This strategy is part of the actions being taken to help the country realise the two-thirds gender principle.

Mwiti notes that the council has rolled out a series of activities to aid in the implementation of the strategy.

These include the development of a mentorship programme to support women leaders at the grassroots level, establishment of a strong communication and branding strategy, and identification of potential and able women leaders to be trained to take up leadership positions.

She says the council plans to bring on board women rights organisations

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<<FROM PAGE 3 for them to support the actualisation of the G7 strategy.

The G7 Strategy is designed to serve as a rallying principle that will guide the current women governors on how to remain responsive to the needs of the community, and provide clarity and priorities for intervention.

The plan is to use the current female governors to encourage other women to aspire for similar positions.

Mwiti expresses the need to develop sustainable strategies for funding for the implementation of the strategy, if women's political participation is to be strengthened.

The G7 Strategy's vision is to model female governors as the transformative leaders and champions of inclusive political representation and participation.

The seven governors who are driving this strategy include: Ann Waiguru - Kirinyaga County, Susan Kihika-Nakuru County, Wavinya Ndeti-Machakos County, Cecily Mbarire-Embu County, Gladys Wanga-Homa Bay County, Kawira Mwangaza-Meru County and Fatuma Achan-Kwale County.

During the launch of the G7 Strategy, Council of Governors Chair Ann Waiguru emphasised the need to accelerate actions on bridging the glaring gender gaps in representation in top leadership positions.

She said that women are not just beneficiaries of development efforts, but are powerful agents of change, catalysts for economic growth, and pillars of societal stability, thus the need to invest in their empowerment.

President William Ruto has reiterated his commitment to gender equality, promising to support women to assume topmost leadership positions as one of the means of attaining the not more than two-thirds gender principle.



**The G7 Strategy's vision is to model female governors as the transformative leaders and champions of inclusive political representation and participation."**



During the Launch of the G7 strategy, he promised to push for the implementation of recommendations of the National Dialogue Committee (NADCO) report that among other things speaks to the achievement of the two-thirds gender principle.

The report has recommended the amendment of the Elections Act 2011 to provide for submission of party lists that comply with the two-thirds gender principle.

It further proposes the establishment of the women inclusion and Political Participation Fund for purposes of financing education and training, mentorship and capacity building, including support for women seeking elective positions.

Currently, the National Assembly has only 80 female members out of the 349 lawmakers. A total of 29 were elected in the 290 constituencies while another 47 were elected as County Woman Representative, with four being nominated. In the Senate, Kenya has a total of 21 female senators in the 67-member House. Of these, three were elected while 18 were nominated.

The Country is racing against time catch-up with its neighbours in East African, majority of whom have achieved the gender thresholds in political representation.

At the moment, Kenya's women representation in National Assembly stands at 23 per cent, when Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania, have surpassed the 30 per cent mark in women political representation.

Still, Kenya and other East African countries are not doing well when it comes to political governance threshold set by the Africa Union, which expects countries on the continent to work towards the 50 per cent representation.

African countries are also expected to abide by the union's Agenda 2063 that speaks to resolving and ending violence against women and girls.

It also commits to improving access to, and control of, finances, land, education, health, information, services, sciences and technology and decision-making in political governance and business enterprises.

--SS--

# Two-thirds gender rule hits a snag in Parliament



Linda Bach speaks during an editors meeting on the Not More Than Two Thirds gender principle held at the Stanley Hotel

## BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

The two-thirds gender principle suffered yet another blow after Parliament failed to adopt proposals by the Multi-Sectoral Working Group (MSWG).

The proposals on the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule were part of the National Dialogue Committee (NADCO) report presented to National Assembly Speaker Moses Wetangula on February 22, this year.

They were then committed to the departmental committee on Justice and Legal Affairs of the National Assembly and the

Senate Standing committee on Justice, Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

According to MSWG co-chairperson Daisy Amdany, "While all the nine NADCO bills have been tabled in Parliament, we do not know what happened to the report compiled by MSWG on the two-thirds gender rule. Our attempts to reach out to the joint JLAC chair, George Murugara, have not borne fruit."

The NADCO report bills introduced before the National Assembly include the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (Amendment) Bill 2024, the

Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Bill 2024, The Leader of Opposition Bill, 20224 and the National Government Coordination (Amendment) Bill 2024.

The Senate on its part has introduced The Elections Offences (Amendment) Bill 2024. The Elections (Amendment) Bill 2024, the Statutory Instruments (Amendment) Bill 2024 and the Political Parties (Amendment) Bill 2024.

In protest, two organisations namely the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness and Crown Trust moved to court seeking orders to compel President William Ruto to dissolve Parliament for failing to meet the two-thirds gender rule.

"We have now moved to court to demand that the Chief Justice advises President William Ruto to dissolve Parliament for not meeting the two-thirds gender rule."

"We are telling the Chief Justice that she has the responsibility to restore constitutional order by telling the president to dissolve Parliament."

According to Amdany, Article 261 of the [PAGE>>6](#)

**<<FROM PAGE 5** Constitution gives Kenyans powers to move to court to compel Parliament to enact the necessary legislation. “We therefore want the Chief Justice to act without further delay and advise the president to dissolve the 13th Parliament.”

The two-thirds gender principle was part of the issues presented to Parliament by the National Dialogue Committee.

The MSWG on two-thirds was established vide Gazette Notices No. 10848 and No. 11090 published on August 15 and August 25, 2023, respectively.

The Group was tasked to develop and recommend a framework for the implementation of the not more than two-thirds gender principle as captured in Articles 27(6) and (7) as well as 81(b) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

The MSWG came up with a raft of proposals that included legal, policy and administrative amendments which, if implemented, would help bridge the gender gap that continues to define Kenyas political landscape.

There is also a proposal to amend Article 90 of the Constitution to accommodate proposed changes to 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 elections. 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,” said Amdany.

The proposed amendment of Article 98 targets the Senate if the scenario is the same.

The Multi Sectoral Working Group has further proposed a transitional clause in Article 98A to enable the current Parliament to conform to the requirements of Article 81(b).

According to the report, a Bill will 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 proposes that a political party must ensure that the names of candidates submitted to the electoral body, for parliamentary and county elections, comply with the two-thirds gender rule.

Amdany says that if the amendment sails through, IEBC will automatically reject all parties that do not confirm.

“We have proposed an

amendment to the Elections Act that political parties participating in elections must ensure that the list of candidates they submit meets the two-thirds gender principle. We are not dictating to them how they should do it, but at the end, IEBC should reject all parties that do not conform.”

She notes that 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 areas where if you win a particular party ticket, you are as good as elected. We are saying, parties need to also prioritise nomination of women as candidates.”

The MSWG also recommended 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 the support for women seeking elective positions.

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

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Milcah Nempiris Lolkurum

# Lolkurum’s leadership efforts brings peace to Samburu County

**M**ilcah Lolkurum is a woman on a peace mission. She has remained consistent and refused to be silenced by the deafening sounds of guns in Samburu and Pokot counties. Not even intimidation by morans can hold her back.

She spends much of her time traversing the expansive Samburu County, especially along its borders with the Pokot, preaching peace.

Since 2018, she has been involved

in peace work, and is known to many people engaged in peace initiatives in the two counties.

Her painful experiences set her on her peace journey and strengthened her resolve to soldier on. “I have seen politicians in Samburu, Baringo, Laikipia and Isiolo counties arm innocent youth who later die in revenge attacks. I have also seen politicians arm their communities with guns,” she says.

Lolkurum, who previously

worked with World Vision, says she took up peace work when the region was burning. Currently the coordinator of Community Safety Initiative-Kenya, which seeks peaceful resolution to conflicts, Lolkurum says there are cases where politicians call on their communities to sell their livestock and buy guns, a situation that has continued to fuel conflict in the four counties.

The Pokot were fighting with the Samburu along the Amaya

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<<FROM PAGE 7 Triangle, which comprises Samburu, Baringo, Laikipia and Isiolo counties.

Most of the conflicts are resource-based, with cattle rustling being a major driver. Morans, community warriors, are major actors in the affected counties. Lolkurum has focused her energies on them with many of the warriors becoming peace champions.

“We told them [that] cattle rustling is not good and owning a gun is not pleasant either. They accepted to reform and we now have an active platform we call the Sambala Youth Forum,” she observes.

There is also the ranger programme, a consortium of nine partners from Samburu, Laikipia, Baringo and Isiolo counties.

Her contribution has earned her recognition and she has been able to draw more women to peace work, especially at the grassroots level. “Today, [many women] have been co-opted into peace committees. We are now fighting for inclusion at the county level.”

Lolkurum recalls that when she joined peace work, women were not recognised as players.

“They were not given space at all. I used to be the only woman in meetings attended by 800 men, but I have since advocated that women be included in our grassroots peace committees.

“Women are supportive when it comes to peace building. They are quick with information sharing. They are also good as an early warning and response system,” she says.

Lolkurum participated in developing the county’s peace

strategic framework, which has been incorporated into the County Integrated Development Plan. “This framework is in the formative stages [but it] will guide all the peace work in the county and the approach it will take.”



**We had cases where women helped us prevent impending attacks planned by Pokot warriors with the help of the security team at the county level.”**

MILCAH NEMPIRIS LOKKURUM



Her success in peace work is attributable to her networks, as well as her good relationships with the community and the government. “I work closely with the government and the vulnerable groups. In addition, I sit on the county peace steering committee, Samburu County Gender Sector Working Group, and I am the secretary at Samburu Peace Actors Forum representing women.”

It is Lolkurum’s networks and solid grounding in peace that the community and county government relied on to ensure peace during the 2022 General Election.

“The capacity building sessions, especially on peace messaging, supported by UN Women through AWC (African Woman and Child Feature Service) have

been of great benefit to me. They especially prepared me well to carry out peace work during the 2022 elections.”

In that year, she was assigned to coordinate peace activities, including multi-stakeholder forums in the Amaya Triangle and cross-border dialogue that brought together people from Samburu, Baringo, Laikipia and Isiolo counties.

Lolkurum says they worked closely with the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) in mapping out hotspot areas.

“This gave us a clear roadmap on where to focus. We organised eight peace caravans in hotspot areas.

“I remember one day when we were leading a caravan in a place called Mundumary, a group of people was circulating leaflets in Kikuyu, Samburu and Turkana languages telling non-Samburus to leave the area. We had to liaise with the sub-county Commissioner to de-escalate the situation.”

Lolkurum’s team brought on board the special interest groups, namely women, youth and people with disability, who volunteered a lot of information.

“We had cases where women helped us prevent impending attacks planned by Pokot warriors with the help of the security team at the county level.”

Her team also worked with intercommunity peace elders, who represented all the tribes in the county, to advocate peace. Peace messages were translated into various languages, with the elders using the messages to speak to their communities.

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<<FROM PAGE 8 The Samburu Council of Elders complemented the peace builders work, reinforcing their voices and messages on local FM stations such as Serian FM, Watman FM and Radio Ashe.

There were also male champions under the banner Pokot, Turkana, Samburu and Kikuyus youth for peace.

“We also developed messages that underscored the need to give women equal space. This approach saw the election of four women, one as a Member of Parliament and three as Members of the County Assembly in Laikipia,” she adds.

To reach young people, especially the moran, Lolkurum and her team used WhatsApp groups, Facebook and Instagram pages as channels for communicating peace messages.

“WhatsApp groups worked well for us. We had powerful and vibrant youth and women groups who helped us in circulating peace messages on these platforms.”

However, these multiple peace strategies have run into headwinds. There is no political goodwill. “We had cases where politicians incited the warriors to invade and graze on the farms owned by white people.

“They would encroach the land, leading to escalation of conflict. We came up with counter messages urging them: ‘Let us give our people equal opportunities, let us not incite our people to invade the ranches.’”

As a result, the conflicts reduced and there was no more encroachment on the ranches.

Meanwhile, some politicians

refused to attend multi-stakeholder forums to address these issues. “The politicians ignored our invitations but played a major role in fueling conflict. They would tell the community that peace builders are liars.

When we spoke out against



**WhatsApp groups worked well for us. We had powerful and vibrant youth and women groups who helped us in circulating peace messages on these platforms.”**

MILCAH NEMPIRIS LOKKURUM



illegal firearms, they would tell the people to sell their livestock and acquire guns.”

“I remember an incident just before the elections where the Pokot were accused of raiding and taking thousands of cattle from Samburu. We intervened with support from the chiefs and the County Commissioners office and recovered 48 cows through dialogue.

While we were in the process of recovering the remaining stolen livestock, politicians organised a revenge attack which culminated in the killing of very many young men.”

Even some people in the community started believing

the politicians. “One of the elders told me to my face ‘you have sung here for a very long time about peace. This peace will never happen. When our morans plan for raids, you report them to the authorities. From today we do not want peace.”

Her biggest dilemma is the environment in which she does her peace work. Lolkurum says that most of the peace meetings they do are attended by armed morans, a situation that creates fear and causes women peace builders to keep away.

For instance, she notes, during recovery missions, the morans make it clear that they do not want to see any women in the meetings. Yet, for us women peace builders, this is part of peace building.

**Useful lessons learnt**

Despite these challenges, Lolkurum has come to learn that women are powerful in managing peace work, given their strategic knowledge when conflicts are likely to happen, who are the perpetrators, and what needs to be done to stop conflicts.

To increase representation of women in peace building, she underscores the need to push for the inclusion of women at all levels of leadership.

“We need to build the capacity of women peace makers and organise exchange programmes between regions. This will help women from marginalised communities who lack requisite knowledge and capacity for peace work to learn from those who excel in the same.”

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# Online violence forces Rachael to flee to exile



Rachael Mwikali

## BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

**W**hen Rachael Mwikali experienced violence in 2019, her life took a painful turn: She had to leave her home in Mathare slums and flee to exile.

Mwikali, a leader and human rights defender, says the people she had worked so hard to defend, and whom she had expected would protect her; joined with other people to fight her. Sensing she had no one to run to, she fled the country.

“My woes started when I took

on a police officer during an interview on a national TV,” she recalls.

It was a panel discussion where Mwikali and the officer were discussing how the police handled investigations into the mysterious death of a human rights defender.

“I was defending a fellow human rights defender who had died. I bravely told the officer on live TV to stop profiling activists. His colleagues at the service were clearly not happy with my actions.”

The next morning, she woke

up to find her photos splashed on a Facebook page known as Nairobi Crime Free. The page, which had been brought down several times by Facebook, is known for profiling criminals, giving them warnings before they are shot dead.

Mwikali’s photos were posted by someone she knew. He had marked her wanted, for leading a criminal gang in Mathare slums.

“They knew sexist claims against me would not hold water because of my training and human rights background. So, they decided to **PAGE>>11**



<<FROM PAGE 10 profile me as a leader of a criminal gang and this scared me,” she says.

“What hurt me most were the comments on the post from people. Some said ‘huyu lazima akule copper’ which translates, this one should be shot dead.”

The most painful part was that some of the comments were from people within her community, some of whom she had defended when their rights were violated.

With some of her friends taking such stands, Mwikali knew it was time she saved her life.

She made frantic calls to many organisations, including the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, and friends at embassies she had partnered with before in her human rights work, for help.

“I could not call the police because they were the perpetrators of the online violence I was going through.”

“The other problem with online violence is that most perpetrators use pseudo accounts. You are dealing with faceless trolls who could be at your doorstep.”

A part from the police violence, Mwaikali has also experienced violence on Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter.

“On WhatsApp, a woman I was working with on Sexual and Reproductive Health and

Rights issues took screenshots of my advocacy work and shared it on another WhatsApp group I was in. She then incited men against me, and what followed were all sorts of



**I am a very empowered woman, but online violence almost destroyed me. I had to go to exile. What about that young girl in the slums who is experiencing online violence for the first time?”**

RACHEAL MWIKALI



abuse.”

Some called her a home wrecker for telling women to report domestic violence and walk out of their abusive marriages.

When the violations became too much, Mwikali says she contemplated quitting social media. But a lot of her work depended on it, and quitting was not an option.

“I did something that many people who have undergone online violence have never done. I conducted an audit on the trolls on Twitter. I realised that most of them did not even have followers meaning their

opinions did not matter to people.”

Still, the attacks made Mwikali stop posting some of the radical work on her social media pages.

“I do a lot of advocacy on very sensitive issues and so to protect myself from online violence, I have had to stop posting some of my work on online platforms.”

She also educates young women on their rights, including online violence, which sometimes does not sit well with some people.

“Many young girls go through online violence. The worst part is that they do not know that the violence they are being subjected to is against the law; and they can report to the police. So, they suffer in silence,” bemoans Mwikali.

“I am a very empowered woman, but online violence almost destroyed me. I had to go to exile. What about that young girl in the slums who is experiencing online violence for the first time?”

She urges online violence victims to speak out and stop dying in silence. “Speaking out helps other people know how to deal with similar situations. I have empowered many people with my story and many young girls in the slums come to me for advice whenever they face online violence.”

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Mary Goretti Boroswa

# From a teacher to renowned political leader

**M**ary Goretti Boroswa was a school teacher when she decided to take up political leadership. Her burning desire to address challenges facing her community made her believe that she could do greater things, if she was in an influential leadership position. This is when she decided to quit teaching and join politics. She spoke to AWC Features about her political journey, her successes, best and bad moment, and how the future looks like. This is what she said.

“My leadership started when I was a head teacher. I also served as a representative for teachers at the Kenya National Union of Teachers, as the female representative of the Eldoret West Branch for 15

years. These positions enabled me to appreciate the challenges faced by communities, especially through the lens of their children’s education. Similarly, I have for many years advocated for the rights of young girls, ensuring their safety during social gatherings.

My burning desire to address these challenges made me believe I could do greater things if I am in an influential leadership position.

Thus in 2017, I decided to go for political leadership. I contested for the position of Women Representative in Uasin Gishu County. Although I did not win, I was nominated as a Member of

the County Assembly (MCA) from 2017 to 2022.

During my tenure as an MCA, I served diligently in various committees, including education and public accounts. I am currently a sitting member of the commissioner board and hold the vice chair position in the cooperative and education committees in the Uasin Gishu County Assembly.

My primary focus with these functions is to foster inclusive development, ensuring that all segments of society, including women, youth, and elders, benefit equitably. Together with the County Government of Uasin Gishu, we have

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<<FROM PAGE 12 prioritised the improvement of road networks, healthcare infrastructure, and bridging critical gaps in access.

My leadership journey and what I do has been greatly influenced by observing leaders who prioritise direct engagement with the people they serve. For instance, I have learned a lot from President William Ruto, whom I admire for his hands-on approach. He used to come to the grassroots personally, ensuring that bursaries were distributed equitably, especially to vulnerable groups like those living with HIV. Witnessing this compassionate leadership inspired me, as I felt compelled to emulate his dedication to community welfare.

My entry into competitive politics had its share of challenges. Lack of funds saw me rely on boda bodas to move me around the county as I campaigned. At one point, at the Segero Barsombe area, I was unable to use a motorbike. A Good Samaritan offered me a vehicle.

In addition to the Good Samaritan, aligning with influential politicians has helped me a lot. I have done this within my political party, United Democratic Alliance (UDA). It is such positioning that saw me in 2022 vie for the Kipsomba Ward seat on a UDA ticket.

The other challenge was the exclusion of my polling station, Teldate, from designated locations where voting would take place. Nevertheless, through persistence and assertiveness, I ensured its inclusion, safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process.

Financial constraints too remain a significant barrier for women in politics, hindering their ability to effectively campaign and mobilise support. While I received support from the party in the form of brochures and t-shirts, grassroots mobilisation requires a lot of resources.



**Young women entering politics must prioritise integrity to earn the trust of society, spouses and supporters.”**

MARY GORETTI BOROSWA



Nevertheless, my campaign strategy centred on direct interaction with the electorate, engaging and dialoguing with them at individual level. This grassroots approach, coupled with the strategic use of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, enabled me to effectively convey my agenda to the electorate.

Secondly, being resilient, engaging with community members, addressing their needs; and sustaining a development agenda that transforms lives, are key to success for women engaging in politics.

I have also learnt that support from your political party is critical. The party played a crucial role in my campaign. Wearing the party's

colours and emblem during events not only unified us, but also garnered appreciation from the community. But this support can only happen if you are loyal to the party, whether you win or lose, will help you win hearts and minds.

In politics, trust is paramount, yet not everyone within your circle may be trustworthy. The key lesson however is to persevere, maintain focus even in the face of adversity.

I urge women aspiring for leadership roles to actively seek them out. Opportunities are rarely handed on a silver platter; one must pursue them diligently. Whether through nomination or direct competition, women should assert themselves and present their manifestos to the community.

Young women entering politics must prioritise integrity to earn the trust of society, spouses and supporters. Upholding one's values ensures respect and credibility, essential for personal and professional growth.

This should be combined by linking these young women to mentors because exposure to diverse experiences and leadership styles, locally and internationally, fosters growth and prepares women for the challenges ahead, including breaking cultural barriers. I am a living testimony that such barriers are not insurmountable. While cultural norms may pose initial challenges, effective communication and a clear vision can garner support and trust from the community

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Online violence

# Undying Spirit: Mwende's resilience in the face of online violence

BY NAOMI WANJIRU

It never occurred to Emma Mwende, an entrepreneur and mother of three, that one day she might be a victim of online violence.

Mwende, a philanthropist who runs a spare parts business, thought her work in the community in Thika would be celebrated by many people. She assumed that her exploits in business would be

used as testimony that indeed women can succeed in work dominated by men.

But this was never to be; the success of her business became her nightmare. "People envious of my success attacked my marital status and empowerment efforts, using hurtful words like "home wrecker" and "liar."

The attacks, which were mainly executed on TikTok, Facebook and WhatsApp

platforms, involved trolling and use of derogatory comments that were said in her mother tongue. The use of mother tongue was intended to have a very deep effect on her psychology and self-esteem.

Those who perpetrated this violence were either competitors or random online users who just saw a topic to jump onto.

"I also came to learn later that supporters **PAGE>>15**



<<FROM PAGE 14 of a female political figure, who thought my women empowerment programmes in the village were a precursor to my joining politics, were behind the attacks.”

The violence became intense when the perpetrators shifted from online to offline. They broke into her office and vandalised her property. In great panic, Mwende rushed to report the matter at Makongeni Police Station where she not only reported the vandalism but the online abuse and threats. She also had to hire security guards to keep vigil at her business premises.

“Initially, the fear and anxiety triggered by the attacks made me stop posting online. Yet these platforms are the largest source of customers for my business. I feared going outside, thinking the online threats could turn into physical attacks. This was so real given that my shop had been targeted,” says Mwende.

But the women who she empowered in the villages and town could not allow this to happen. They came to her rescue.

“The unwavering support from the women I was empowering helped me to regain the courage to reopen my online accounts and continue my initiatives, although the fear of being targeted still persists to date, online and offline.”

Mwende feels that although she had not expressed any interest in politics, a large part of her problems and interference in her business were politically motivated. Some political leaders thought her women empowerment initiatives were stealing the thunder from them or making them face serious accountability questions from the electorate.

“I believe the attacks were meant to undermine my efforts around women empowerment, and to ensure I do not outshine



**I believe the attacks were meant to undermine my efforts around women empowerment, and to ensure I do not outshine local leadership.”**

EMMA MWENDE



local leadership.”

She says such online violence takes a woman many steps back. She endured a lot as she struggled to get over the attacks. At one point, she had to undergo therapy to manage emotional stress.

“Overcoming what I went through took time, therapy

and resilience that gradually made me stronger. I learned not to take online comments personally, recognising that some people jump onto topics and spread misery without even knowing the real story behind online attacks. In my case, I suspected that some people were paid to smear my name to discredit me.”

The violence also affected her children. Even though the abusers did not target the children directly, they affected her emotions and she was therefore not always at her best for her children. At some point she was so distressed that she took time away to avoid snapping at the children and her partner.

Her experiences online have now transformed her into an online safety advocate. “My experience drives me to advocate for police officers to look at online violence as a genuine form of violence.”

She advocates for women facing online violence to reach out to a circle of supportive friends.

“I recommend that they tweak their social media platform settings to control comments and limit or eliminate direct messages for added safety.”

Looking into the future, Mwende says she will use her experience to build her resilience.

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