

***perspectives***  
*on gender discourse*

***Enhancing Women's  
Political Participation***

***6/08***

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Authors: Deborah Okumu, Prof. Jacqueline Adhiambo-Oduol, Kepta Ombati, Dr. Nyokabi Kamau, Okiya Omtatah Okoiti

Editor: Dr. Nyokabi Kamau

Heinrich Böll Stiftung, East & Horn of Africa Office, Forest Road  
P.O. Box 10799-00100 GPO, Nairobi, Kenya.  
Telephone: ++254-20-3750329, -3744227, -2309405  
Fax: ++254-20-3749132  
Email: [nairobi@hbfha.com](mailto:nairobi@hbfha.com)  
Website: [www.hbfha.com](http://www.hbfha.com)

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## **Authors**

### **Dr. Nyokabi Kamau**

Dr. Nyokabi Kamau is a Social Worker and Sociologist specializing in gender studies. She holds a PhD and an MA in gender studies both from the University of London, Institute of Education. She also holds an MA in Sociology and a BA in Social Work from the University of Nairobi. Nyokabi has consulted for a variety of NGOs in Kenya (including, amongst others, Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ); the Jesuit refugee service, American Peace Corps, Action Aid, Commonwealth Education Fund) specifically in the areas of gender, politics, education and HIV/AIDS. Between 1998 and 2003, she was a lecturer at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. She has published widely in book chapters, local and international journals, professional newsletters and has presented papers in various local and international conferences. She is currently working as the Kenya gender mentor for the Commonwealth Education Fund and is a Senior Lecturer and Director of St Paul's Institute of Life Long Learning at St. Paul's University, Limuru.

### **Jacqueline Adhiambo-Oduol**

Before her appointment as Secretary for Children Affairs in the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development in April 2008, Jacqueline Adhiambo-Oduol had been working since May 1994 at United States International University as a lecturer on Intercultural Communication, Critical Thinking Skills and Gender Studies. During this period, she was also an expert on various assignments related to gender, leadership and conflict prevention and is widely known for her unique ability to break resistance strategies and to create space for the cross fertilisation of ideas. Her publications to date include *English as a Lingua Franca: A Threat to Gender Discourse. The Case of Dholuo* (2007). Forth coming publications include *What Happens To Women in Leadership? Unique Questions: Precise Answers* and *Gender Discourse in Africa: Conceptions of Quality from An African Perspective*.

### **Okiya Omtatah Okoiti**

Okiya Omtatah Okoiti is a Nairobi based playwright, author and media commentator on political, social and religious issues.

**Ms. Deborah Okumu**

Ms. Deborah Okumu, Executive Director of Kenya Women Political Caucus holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Nairobi and a UN fellowship Masters Degree in Demography and Population Planning from the University of Ghana – Legon. Ms. Okumu has a wealth of experience in policy analysis, programme planning, management and Evaluation. She is a well trained administrator and technocrat whose experience draws from working in key government Ministries in Kenya which include the Ministry of Planning and National Development, the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services. Prior to joining the Caucus, Ms. Okumu served as a Senior Gender Consultant for various NGOs amongst them, FEMNET, ANCPAN and CLEAR. As a UNFPA National Programme Officer, her assignment covered the area of a technical advisor on use of Gender statistics for planning and programming.

**Kepta Ombati**

Kepta Ombati is the Chief Executive of the Youth Agenda (YAA) and Co-Initiator of the Women and Youth Alliance.

## **Preface**

Despite much rhetoric about gender equity, the role of women in Kenyan electoral politics remains dismally low – even by regional standards. The percentage of female members in the national Parliament may serve as the most direct indicator: Parliaments in all neighbouring countries in the East African Community comprise a female membership of at least 30%, with Rwanda (with 48.8%) nearly having achieved parliamentary gender parity, and thus constituting the world’s most advanced country in this respect. In Kenya, by contrast, the figure stood at a paltry 7.3% for the Parliament elected in 2002; and only ten out of Kenya’s sixteen female Members of Parliament (MPs) had actually been elected, while the others were among the dozen MPs nominated by political parties after the 2002 elections<sup>1</sup>. In many respects, Kenya likes to see itself as the most advanced country in East Africa. With regard to gender equality in politics it surely is not; instead, it trails behind all others.

With general elections coming up in Kenya at the end of the year, various initiatives to improve this situation began in 2007. For a while, even a trend to specifically woo female voters became apparent. By July 2007, government and opposition competed to be seen as the most “women-friendly” political grouping, promising to introduce a substantial number of seats in Parliament to be reserved for women. However, this initiative – if it was ever seriously pursued – failed within a month, due to constitutional considerations as well as to reasons of everyday political competition. Still, the episode showed the considerable potential for gender-specific appeals and approaches in Kenyan politics.

Since 2002, the Nairobi office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) has been organizing its Gender Forum, a regular series of public debates held in downtown Nairobi to discuss a wide range of political issues from a gender perspective. Over the years, the Gender Forum has become an institution in its own right, regularly attracting an audience of 150-200 people of various backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of Kenya’s civil society and its politically-interested public. Advised and supported by a steering committee that is composed of Kenyan women’s activists, HBF devoted the 2007 Gender Forum series in its entirety for information and reflection about the possibilities for,

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<sup>1</sup>For an up-to-date comprehensive global overview on female representation in national parliaments see <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (also including historical data).

and constraints to, increased female participation in party politics and elected offices. This approach has proved successful, as the Forum debates were lively, and frequently, female candidates from different parties among Kenya's political spectrum were present and contributed either as speakers or as participants in the discussions from the general audience.

The current volume comprises four out of the seven presentations made at the HBF Gender Forum in 2007, looking at various dimensions and problems of women's political practice in Kenya. Some of the contributions discuss whether there is (or should be) a specifically female way of doing politics, as well as the issue of affirmative action. Others address the gender-specific risks of political violence and discuss the possibility of an alliance of female and youth political leaders. The volume also includes an essay presenting the preliminary results of a study – commissioned by HBF and expected to be completed in late 2008 – about successful Kenyan female political leaders and their approach to politics. Three presentations at the 2007 Gender Forum series – on gender-specific aspects of the political parties' programmes; about gender-specific aspects of election-related media coverage; and on gender issues in the Electoral Commission's work – could not be included in this volume, as no edited papers were made available. Still, this volume provides a good overview about core issues and perspectives in female participation in electoral politics in Kenya.

The general elections held on December 27th, 2007, resulted in the most severe political crisis that Kenya has ever experienced since its independence in 1963. It led to violence on a mass-scale, and women have suffered a great deal in it. The conflict about the disputed presidential election results brought the country to the brink of civil war; the question of how to address the underlying reasons of the crisis – much of it related to issues of justice and equity in access to resources and opportunities – will be high on the agenda for a long time to come.

The seriousness of the post-election crisis overshadowed the fact that outcome of the parliamentary elections was much less controversial than the presidential results. Furthermore, the parliamentary election results have shown at least one encouraging trend: A substantial numbers of MPs are newcomers to the institution, perhaps providing an opportunity to bring fresh approaches into Kenyan politics.

At the same time, the inroads made by women into elected office appear meagre. 269 out of the 2,548 parliamentary candidates in the 2007 general election had

been women, up from 44 of the 1,015 legislative aspirants in 2002, and this pattern prevailed in all major political parties<sup>2</sup>. By 2008, the number of elected female MPs had risen from 10 to 15, and they were supplemented by another five women nominated to Parliament. Overall, female representation in Kenya's Parliament has increased – but only marginally so – to 8.9%. The issues discussed at the 2007 Gender Forum continue to remain relevant for the future engagement of women in Kenya's electoral politics.

I wish to thank all who participated in the shaping, organization and debates of the 2007 Gender Forum series and the contributors to this volume. Special thanks go to Dr. Nyokabi Kamau for her contribution to the introductory chapter as well as her editing of the publication, and to Wanjiku Wakogi, HBF's gender programme co-ordinator, who organized the Forum and prepared this publication.

Dr. Axel Harneit-Sievers  
Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation  
Regional Office for East & Horn of Africa  
Nairobi, September 2008

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<sup>2</sup>Caroline Wafula, "15 women fight their way into elective positions", Daily Nation, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

# Introduction

*Dr. Nyokabi Kamau*

When we talk about women and political participation, numbers are usually central. However, it is worthwhile to think beyond numbers and see what it is that women can and should do if elected into political positions.

Much research in the area of the role of women leaders has shown that more women in leadership would help solve a lot of problems associated with perpetual poverty (Clinton-Rodham, 2003; Kamau, 2003; Neuman, 1998; Nzomo, 2003a, 2003b; World Bank, 2003). It would help to balance decision-making, which in most cases does not have women in mind. Such decisions as concern education, reproductive health in particular and health in general, agriculture, trade, the girl child, gender equity etc require women's input. The presence of women in senior positions is one of the most effective and immediate ways of ensuring their participation in the decision making process for the good of women, children and the nation in general.

As a nation we need to appreciate the fact that it will be impossible to build a modern nation on the basis of exclusion and inequality. Involving women in leadership will bring the diversity that would help us have policies that are not monopolistic, centralized and non-competitive which lead to bad economies. A society that taps the talents of 100% of its people is a stronger society, because it can pool on a broader talent pool, it leads to governance that is more reflective and representative.

Nevertheless, it is well known that not all women given senior positions provide the desirable characteristics mentioned, but there seems to be a tendency to judge women much more harshly. In addition, it is more difficult for women's impact to be felt if they do not form a critical mass in senior leadership positions. Currently in Kenya, we are still struggling to even get to 30% yet critical mass has been found to be reached at about 40%. We may therefore be judging the few women too harshly.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia has been quoted to have noted that 'women's vision for society often differs from men's because they understand clearly the impact of distorted priorities on their families and communities. The

vision of women is one of inclusion, not exclusion, peace, not conflict, integrity not corruption and consensus not imposition'. Are these the issues that women would and should focus on? Are these gender issues?

These questions are addressed in **Dr. Nyokabi Kamau's chapter: The Value Proposition to Women's Leadership: Perspectives of Kenyan Women Parliamentary and Civic Leaders (2003 to 2007)**. The chapter presents preliminary findings of a study carried out in 2007 which draws on women parliamentarians and civic leaders perceptions of their vision, mission, achievements, challenges and future plans. The study sought to establish the value added by women parliamentary and civic politicians in Kenya – with a focus on the period 2003 - 2007 which for the first time in Kenya's history recorded the highest number of women parliamentarians, at 18 out of 222. This chapter makes explicit the embedded male structures in politics that hinder women's participation right from the grassroots, and even when they get to the top, they still face challenges that make it harder for them to operate or even to publicise their achievements. The study utilises feminist concepts, theories and methodology in order to answer the research question, "Do women bring a different perspective into politics?". The preliminary findings of the study show that women develop their vision of leadership from experiences they faced as young girls growing in a society with major gender inequalities. When they get into politics, women's priorities are guided by their vision to see a world where men and women, and all other people who may be vulnerable get equal opportunities. Majority of the women interviewed were drawn to the human development approach in the projects that they supported.

## **Gender Equality**

In a World Economic Forum report of 2005, gender equality is defined as "that stage of human social development at which the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female". The report is also quick to remove the misunderstandings that equate gender to women, but rather it refers to both men and women, and to their status, relative to each other.

If the millennium development goals are a guide as to what the key pillars of development are, then it is clear that without gender equality, there cannot be development. In a nutshell the MDGs state: Eradicate extreme poverty and

hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; combat HIV and AIDS and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. None of these goals can and will be achieved if there is no gender equality and if women lack symbolic power and social capital to participate equally with men.

In 2005, The World Economic Forum undertook a study to establish the global gender gap. The study measured the extent to which women have achieved full equality with men in five critical areas of economic participation; economic opportunity; political empowerment; educational attainment; and health and well-being. Looking at all these dimensions was meant to show that gender equality is required across the board, and the report recognises the inextricable link between all the five dimensions and demonstrates that gender equality must be achieved in all, in order to be achieved at all. Hence, taking a girl to school, yet she cannot find a job due to the barriers in the workplace is not helping her. In addition it is no good for this young girl to get a job if again she is barred from rising to the top of the organisation due to gender stereotypes in the workplace. Even if she rises to the top yet she has no access to quality reproductive health care means she may die in child birth. She could survive all these, but she goes back home to a violent husband or she cannot be out at night for fear of being raped! In other words, the dignity and rights of a woman have to be present in all aspects of her life.

The year 2007 recorded the largest number of women vying for parliamentary and civic positions. However, coming out in large numbers is only but the beginning of a long journey as argued in Prof. Jacqueline Oduol's chapter titled **“Practicing Politics: the Female Side of the Coin - Enhancing Womens’ Political Participation in the Imminent General Elections of 2007”**. The chapter focuses on the challenges that women face in elective politics in the context that she refers to as the art and science of practicing politics: ‘selecting yourself’, ‘being selected by the party’ and ‘getting elected’<sup>3</sup>. The chapter identifies the elements that she considers key to transforming the political climate in favour of women, showing in each case the hindrances that women must handle through

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<sup>3</sup>A categorization that I take from Richard E. Matland in his article / book chapter ‘Enhancing Women’s Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems’ in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, 2nd edition (ed.) Azza Karam and Julie Ballington, Stockholm, Sweden: IDEA Publishing (2005)

the key elements. It further demonstrates how this is linked to what Oduol refers to as ‘the art and science of political engagement’. The chapter concludes by looking at how women in Kenya have addressed the obstacles with some ideas on what the author thinks every woman who seeks to engage in active politics must not forget.

Whenever the issue of gender equality is mentioned, affirmative action has to be addressed if existing inequalities have to be overcome. In his chapter, **“The Affirmative Action Debate: Developing Winning Strategies”**, Okiya Omtatah provides a very interesting theoretical and practical debate on affirmative action focusing on politics. He starts the chapter by defining affirmative action in general and specifically explains why it is necessary for Kenyan women given the traditional inferior positions held by Kenyan women. Omtatah does appreciate the affirmative action debate is complicated and controversial, hence requires to be handled with a lot of care by looking at all sides of the coin which he does very well in the chapter. While appreciating all the challenges involved in implementing, affirmative action, Omtatah, goes beyond the affirmative action debate and provides some very practical strategies for winning elections especially to women candidates. The chapter concludes by noting that ‘affirmative action is not a slogan for politics; it is a strategy for development, it must stop being a bumper sticker and become a plan of action’.

Building up on issues raised in Oduol’s chapter about what women must address if they are to be elected in parliament, is the issue of gender based violence that tends to be specifically targeted towards women candidates. In Deborah Okumu’s chapter titled **“(Re) - Configuring Gender-Based Electoral Violence as ‘Political Rape’**”, it is argued that ‘Gender-based Election-related violence’ is a kind of narrative or grammar that can be seen as political rape. The chapter draws parallels between sexual rape of women and the corresponding ‘political rape’ while noting that violence is a key ingredient that underlines the two. The argument running through the chapter is that that violence or the threat of it has traditionally been used during electioneering periods to silence aspiring women leaders and women’s activism in general. Such violence seeks to humiliate and degrade women. It is argued that this violence takes various shapes such as physical, sexual and psychological nature occurring in the family, community and perpetrated or condoned by institutions and lack of law. The chapter ends with a fairly comprehensive list on what can be done to curb gender based election related violence.

The final chapter by Kepta Ombati titled “**Strategy for Raising the Profile of and Leveraging Women and Young Candidates for the 2007 General Elections**” builds on the issues raised in the other chapters focusing on specific issues that affect the youth and women in their quest for participation in electoral politics. This chapter presents a strategy for improving the performance of women and youth candidates in national elections. The immediate target being the 2007 general elections but the strategy seeks to leverage the participation of these two constituencies over a longer time. The chapter presents a detailed strategy adapted by the Women and Youth Alliance (WAYA) to assist women and youth to get elected in 2007 and beyond.

The volume makes some very interesting and informative reading on various factors that hinder and those that can enhance women’s participation in politics. I hope the great ideas shared in the chapters will be put to use to help increase gender equality not just in politics but in all other aspects of development.

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## Chapter One

# **The Value Proposition to Women's Leadership: Perspectives of Kenyan Women Parliamentary and Civic Leaders (2003 to 2007)<sup>4</sup>**

By Dr. Nyokabi Kamau

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<sup>4</sup>Excerpt from the ongoing Heinrich Böll Foundation study on the Value Proposition to Women's Leadership commissioned in 2007.

## **Introduction**

Women have both a right and an obligation to active participation in political leadership. In addition to this human right and obligation, political analysts and researchers have noted that when women get into leadership and management, they bring a different perspective from men (Clinton, 2003; Kamau, 2003, 2006b; Maathai, 2006; Neuman, 1998b; Thomas & Wilcox, 2005; Wanjohi, 2003; Wyn et al., 2000). These and other writers have noted that more women in politics would not only be a good thing, it would also help solve a lot of problems associated with perpetual poverty. It has also been noted that women's leadership not only helps in building nations but it would also help to balance up the decision making processes which in most cases do not have women in mind. Such decisions as concern education, health, gender violence, women's economic empowerment, peace, rights, dignity, and democracy are usually of great concern to women.

In recent years women's political participation has increased in Africa. In the UN report "Africa and the Millennium Development Goals – 2007 Update", it is noted that the share of Parliamentary seats held by women increased from 7 per cent in 1990 to 17 per cent in 2007, which is close to the global average. At the time of this study, women comprised of 48.8 percent of seats in the Rwandan Lower House, the highest percentage worldwide. In January 2006, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became President of Liberia and Africa's first elected woman president. According to the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), 30% of Africa's local councillors are women. Some countries have set quotas or reserved seats for women in national and local legislative bodies.

Despite this progress, serious and persistent obstacles still hinder the advancement of women and their participation in decision-making processes. Some of the principal obstacles are related to persistent poverty, lack of equal access to health, education, training and employment, cultural barriers, the impact of armed conflict and natural disasters that affect some of the countries of the region.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action emphasized that "women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the perspective of women at all levels of decision-making,

the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.” The Platform defined two strategic objectives: (a) ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in all power structures and decision-making; and (b) increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in its Article 7, called upon State parties “to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country”. In its resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Security Council also reaffirmed the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, as well as the need to increase their role in decision-making.

That women bring a different perspective may not be in dispute, however, no research has specifically looked into the issues that Kenyan women legislators have particularly focused on. Such a study may have been hindered by the fact that only very few women have been in our Parliament. With 18 women, the 9th Parliament had the highest number of women in Kenya’s history, hence justifying the need for a study at this point in Kenya’s history to establish how women view themselves as leaders, if they are any different from men leaders and if constituents view women and men leaders differently and which of the two they prefer. During the same period (2003-2007), there were five women mayors. Given the few number of women compared to men, it may not be easy to tell what perspective these women have brought to their leadership that may be counted as women specific and one that would be used to advocate for election and nomination of more women. In addition, the introduction of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) may have put some of the MPs in the 9th Parliament at a better footing than the nominated MPs. Given that almost half of the women were nominated hence had no access to the CDF and no specific constituency may have limited their potential.

Some sceptics have argued that once women occupy political positions, they forget the plight of their fellow women. On the other hand, some women in political positions say once they are in power, they face a lot of stigma from ruthless men who are out to get them at the slightest mistake they make. Therefore most of their time is spent trying to attain certain standards recognizable by the men folk. It is this dilemma that takes them away from problem solving to concentration on position security.

The researcher, carried out this study in 2007 based on the belief that having spent close to five years in Parliament, the women would have had enough time to clearly articulate what they had achieved, their leadership ideals and vision, challenges and a view of their future in politics. There was also a need to record what women had to say about their leadership ideals and vision. Many times women are described by others and they hardly get a chance to describe themselves from their own perspective. More often those who take it upon themselves to describe women leaders tend to only focus on their weaknesses, but hardly focus on their strengths and achievements. The research was set on the premise that if a women's perspective in leadership does indeed exist, and if women have focused on issues in ways that have especially been neglected by male leaders in the past, then we would have a strong case to urge the electorate to vote for more women leaders and political parties to nominate more women after the election.

### **What Issues Can Women if Elected into Political Office Address More Effectively?**

Having few numbers of women in the policy making bodies of the country is obviously not good for Kenyan women and indeed the entire country. There are many examples from all over the world which show that women do bring a different perspective into political leadership (Epstein et al., 2005; Kamau, 2003, 2007). In the United States for example, women politicians have said that it was only after they took their place in congress that women's issues such as health care, child care and support, sexual harassment, domestic violence and gender based waged differentials among others, were given priority (Epstein et al., 2005; Neuman, 1998a). As Epstein et al noted, studies in the USA have consistently shown women legislators to be more liberal and feminist than their male colleagues. Epstein et al present data collected in 1999 and 2002 from legislators in all fifty states of the USA. Overall, the data indicates that women state legislators are systematically different from their male counterparts with respect to their levels of political ambition, professionalization, legislative activities, ideology and issue of specialization. The data from these two surveys generally suggested that both in behaviour and attitudes, women and men reveal differences in their approach to legislative tasks (ibid.).

In Kenya, we have seen some legislative changes in favour of women in the current Parliament, which enjoys the largest number of women since

independence. Some examples include; removing tax from sanitary wear and diapers, passing into law the sexual offences bill, and an increased focus on the gender issues and HIV and AIDS especially by the Minister for Health who was a woman. The Sexual Offences Act, which was spearheaded by a nominated woman MP initially received a lot of opposition from the male members. It was after much lobbying by the women legislators and women civil society organisations that the act saw the light of day. However, due to the opposition it received from men, some important clauses had to be removed for example marital rape and criminalisation of female circumcision. Even after the success with the Act, an Affirmative Action Bill introduced towards the end of the 9th Parliament was thrown out through a technicality of lack of quorum all designed by the male MPs who claimed that the Minister for Justice, Hon. Martha Karua did not consult enough.

However, this was not a unique case of lack of consulting by the Minister as history clearly shows that the male dominated Kenyan Parliament consistently blocked legislative initiatives that address women's issues. For example the Equality, Domestic Violence and Affirmative Action Bills of yesteryears have been variously thrown out of Parliament because majority of male legislators do not support the enactment of such laws, which can have a negative effect on them (Kamau, 2003; Nzomo, 2003).

The argument that women leaders support issues that are gender sensitive or women friendly has not been without some opposition. In an opinion in the Daily Nation, Pinto (2007) argued that most of the prominent women politicians have failed to show commitment to gender issues in ways that would make any impact on gender equality and equity in this country.

It is against this background that this study was carried out. The objective was to carry out some case studies of women MPs and mayors to investigate if their leadership had focused on issues that affect women specifically and if their perspective was of any benefit to issues that matter most to women. For comparison, two men were included, one an aspirant and one an elected MP to find out if there were differences in their perspectives with the women.

## **Public View of Women as Political Leaders**

How the public views leadership is influenced by many factors, some of which are discussed by the authors in this collection. One of the factors is the general structure or model of the electoral system that emphasizes on geographical hail representation (Jo-Ansie, 2001). In such a structure, the political leader whether civic or parliamentary must hail from a particular territory and be registered as a voter in that territory<sup>5</sup>. This geographical hailing has some gender implications for married women. Generally when women get married they are said to belong to their husband's constituency. In situations where the couple has resided in cities for years, the woman is seen as a stranger in her husband's place yet she is hardly accepted in her home of birth. This is a factor that has hindered a lot of women from being recognised as leaders belonging to these areas. Majority of the women who have been elected either vie in their husbands constituencies (for example, Charity Ngilu, Nyiva, Jebii Kilimo, Christine Mango) or if they go back to where they were born, they tend be single or divorced (e.g. Wangare Maathai, Martha Karua, Adelina Mwau). The elected person is by implication held responsible for the socio-economic and developmental needs of the populace of the particular territory, in this case – constituency. If a woman has been married elsewhere, then the people seem to fear that she will not look after them.

In Kenya, resources play a crucial role in determining the kind of people who get elected. There are still many people who judge good leaders by the amount of cash they can give out especially in the popular fund raising drives commonly referred to as 'harambees'. It is those who give the most that get the votes and unfortunately not many women can compete materially with the men given the patriarchal structures in operation as noted earlier. Generally very few women are able to raise the roughly Kshs. 4,000,000 (as a minimum) needed to run a successful campaign. Although there has been a lot of civic education so that people can select quality leaders without looking at the handouts, this will take some time before the impact is seen in the whole country. Fund-raising for campaigns has not yet picked well in our country. The person aspiring is usually expected to have money and very few people are willing to provide financial support to aspirants. When support does come, for women it may mean one compromising their standards.

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<sup>5</sup>Section 32 (1) and 34 of the Constitution of Kenya and Section 10 and 53(5) of the Local Government Act Cap 265

Political parties in Kenya are also not well established to support candidates financially. On the contrary, candidates are expected to fund parties. For example, for the 2007 elections, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and Ford Kenya parties had fixed the nomination fee for their presidential candidates at almost Kshs. 2,000,000. This kind of fee is discouraging to many women candidates who may not have the economic muscle that their male colleagues enjoy. Women candidates generally depend on the support they receive from the pro-women Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The issue of resources continues to play a role in the way politicians are viewed even while in Parliament.

Besides lack of support for resources by political parties, most of the parties in Kenya have continued to be male dominated a fact that is apparent from the leadership of the major parties not just in Kenya but the world over. The public is likely to view leaders more seriously if they also hold prominent positions in major political parties. The issue of parties is discussed further in Oduol's chapter in this collection.

The socio-cultural nature of our traditional communities has made family/community/tribal/lineage ties become deeply imbedded in the concept of our social responsibilities. Our political leaders are not exempt from this phenomenon which underscores the patronage system. As such, our political leaders are similarly affronted by this pressure to appear conscientious of the plight of their kinship which ultimately affects their being defined as "good leaders". Dorman (2006) calls this a "patrimonial system" in which power is centralized in one individual applying it for his self-interest and loyal supporters are rewarded and selectively favoured. Furthermore, politics continues to be conducted within a closely knit network of dependent relationships. Although this type of system occurs elsewhere, it is particularly prevalent in the majority of African states where political power is personal and politics is a type of business as political positions (Kebonang, 2005). This system tends to favour men as leaders more than women given the patriarchal nature of Kenyan communities.

Another factor that determines the definition of political leadership in Kenya today, and one that ostensibly forms the basis of this assessment is the question of the "gender" of the political leader. Many scholars approach the question of leadership differences between men and women through the social construct of gender, or traits associated with masculinity and femininity, and what we think about in terms of leadership usually falls within 'masculine' traits.

The prejudices of the patriarchal society have presumed that only men make good leaders because of their character (perceived as strong, focused, assertive and dominant) viz a viz women's perceived non-leadership abilities (emotional, careful, timid etc).

These factors and others like ideological/psychological ones (discussed in Oduol's chapter) have played a big role in determining the expectations of political leadership that the electorate/citizenry place on their chosen leaders. Thus, though these expectations may fall outside the academic scope of good or effective leadership as academically defined, they are nevertheless the factors that determine choice of, and eventual leaders.

### **Research Design / Methodology**

This being a research about and on women, it utilised a feminist methodology, which is defined as methods, which empower research participants. Feminist methodology requires the researcher to think differently about the process of doing research. According to Leonard (2001), feminist research is different from other social science research. This is because feminist research has a participatory role and it challenges the experts while trying to give 'voice' to silenced groups (ibid). It also seeks to minimise the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched and to maximise the reciprocity. Feminist research is especially concerned with ethical issues and it is opposed to treating people as research subjects (ibid.).

Feminist methodology and approaches help the researcher to begin generating concepts about women's experiences. The feminist researcher develops a language and theories to work with, which can help to describe women's experiences and reality of their lives. Feminist research demands that we generate words and concepts that spring from women's actual experiences. Feminist methodology uses methods, approaches and theories that allow for the understanding of ways in which women's experiences are structured in a male dominated world (Blackmore, 1999; Harding, 1991; *Kelly et al.*, 1994; Maynard, 1994; Phoenix, 1994; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley, 1990).

Since the introduction of the constituency development fund (CDF), much focus on MPs for example has been on their utilisation of this fund. Given that 8 of the 18 women in the 9th Parliament were nominated, meant that they had no

access to the CDF. It is also worth noting that cabinet ministers tend to have more tangible achievements than MPs and given that only two women were full cabinet ministers, then their work may not have been easy to quantify and/or qualify. The performance of MPs has also been measured on their contribution in the floor of the house where some of the women have been ranked lowest. By using a feminist methodology, we focused on other areas of women's work especially their roles in Parliamentary committees, which are not always made public. It is worth noting that even in these committees their roles have not been public given that no committee in the 9th Parliament was chaired by a woman. We also focused on the programmes and issues that they have addressed internationally, nationally and in their constituencies, many of which may never have been covered in the public media.

## **Data Presentation and Discussion**

The research findings outlined here focus on the background and personal profiles of the interviewees; their passion, zeal and motivation; and last but not least, the projects that the women leaders have given priority to. In so doing, the findings begin by assessing their perspectives on what they think moulded them into leadership, seeking to contribute to the popular debate as to whether leaders are born or made. By asking the interviewees to provide their background information, the study intended to assess ways in which the women leaders grounded their passion and zeal and ultimate preparation for leadership to issues related to the private and personal aspects of their lives. Last, but most importantly, the section discusses the projects that the interviewees have given priority to during their terms in office. This reflection provides a framework for evaluating the focus choice options, and hence the value addition that women bring to leadership. When appraising the projects they have concentrated on during their tenures, one is able to discern the particular thinking and development framework that guides these leaders.

Since the interviews were not about issues that would be considered confidential, the real names of the interviewees are used throughout the chapter. All their names are used when mentioned for the first time, subsequently only their first names are used and without titles. This rule excludes Esther Keino who shares the first name with another respondent, hence we use her sir name, Keino.

## The Moulding of a Leader

Hon. Njoki Ndung'u, who became one of the most prominent MPs in the 9th Parliament, said that her interest in politics dates back to her days as a law student at the University of Nairobi. She wrote her dissertation on the abuse of police powers. After graduating, she joined the Attorney General's chambers, then with a very idealistic view that she could change the government from within. She eventually left the government to pursue her Masters degree. She decided not to go back to work with the government service and joined the Institute for Education and Democracy. It was while working at the Institute that she became involved in election monitoring - an experience which she noted exposed her to the intricacies of politics and leadership:

*This was my first real contact with political parties and politicians because I got deeply involved in monitoring of elections, and with that work I got to know Members of Parliament and the different political parties. We started auditing the parties, their manifestos and then my involvement with politics came from that... which I can say was very academic ...people join politics in different ways. I can say that I got into politics from a very technical point. Up to date I tend to think of myself as a technocrat than a platform politician.*

In the early days of her career, Njoki also worked as a board member with the Federation of Women Lawyers, (FIDA). While there, she together with others steered FIDA from just a legal Aid NGO to an advocacy based organization where they focused more on changing laws to help more women access legal aid through government support rather than just helping a few women. Njoki has kept to this passion of changing laws to assist women. She took this passion to Parliament where she will be remembered for the role she played in the passing of the Sexual Offences Act.

Esther Wanjiku Mwaura, an aspirant in 2007, began exhibiting her leadership traits while in primary school. As a student, she was not content with the generalization that her teachers and superiors made of her and her peers – and often challenged this by asserting her individual rights. This not only catapulted her into a leadership position in her class and school environment, but instilled in her the conviction to seek a political leadership position as was her quest in the 2007 general elections. At the time of the interview, Wanjiku was holding

a national office in Groots Kenya, a network of women self-help groups and community organizations in Kenya, In this capacity she has helped to improve the living standards of thousands of women in Kenya and globally.

Hon. Prof. Christine Mango began her political linkages and aspirations through her husband's experience as Member of Parliament from 1979 – 1988. As is expected with political wives, she supported her husband through overt campaigns and interactions with constituents, gaining a lot of exposure and interest in the work and commitments of political leaders. She has spent most of her life in research and teaching at the Maseno University, and her leadership traits are evident not only from her achievements as a PhD holder in Parasitology/ Entomology but more so from the challenges she has overcome in realizing her academic and personal accolades. She attained her PhD while still raising her family but with a lot of support from her husband who looked after them. She has been a director of the Centre for the Study of Lake Victoria and its Environs (CSOLVE), placing the centre at the forefront of spearheading research and dialogue on the challenges of Lake Victoria. Unfortunately, upon seeking leave to attend her children's graduation ceremony in the United States, Prof. Mango returned to find a disbanded centre, and her family evicted from her university staff house. Retaining a solid composure, Christine put in her resignation and after intense reflection and soul searching, and motivated by her experiences in work and career, she decided to venture into politics in Butula Constituency. Despite the myriad of monetary, cultural and gender stereotyped challenges that face women aspirants, she managed to beat her predominately male competition to emerge Member of Parliament – the first female Parliamentarian in the constituency.

Hon. Dr. Julia Ojiambo's name is as old as Kenyan politics. She began demonstrating her frontrunner traits by gaining admission to the prestigious Alliance Girls High School. She was among the first lot of students admitted for technical courses at the Royal Technical College (later to become the University of Nairobi) because of her interest in sciences and technical work. Here she specialized in human nutrition, and upon completion taught home science and biology, and eventually got into research at the University of Nairobi specializing in public health. Kwashiorkor and Marasmus were prevalent epidemics in those days, which in Julia's opinion possessed the stigma element, and misinformation that HIV and AIDS has developed today. Thus, while joining her medical doctor husband at Makerere University, she joined up with

a renowned team of academicians researching on Kwashiorkor – and eventually developed a high protein biscuit from local sources. This work developed into a further interest in nutrition and diet habits of pregnant and lactating mothers and their children, which culminated in her receiving a scholarship from the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) to undertake a graduate course in public health nutrition and nutrition research at the University of London, and a subsequent World Health Organization fellowship at Harvard and at McGill Universities. She has since lectured at the University of Nairobi, and was the 1st African woman to be appointed to teach in the faculty of Education, moving up the academic ladder from a tutorial fellow, to a lecturer, to a senior lecturer / Associate Professor.

Julia's political leadership achievements are innumerable. As the first female Assistant Minister in independent Kenya, she has held various portfolios including Women Affairs, Education, Housing and Social Services. While in charge of Women issues, she initiated the International Year of Women, and planned the Kenya government programme of participation in the UN–Women World Conferences at Mexico, Jerusalem, Copenhagen and Nairobi. As a Deputy leader of the Government Delegation at Copenhagen, she initiated the resolution to bring the – Decade U.N World Women Conference to Nairobi in 1985, spearheading a campaign that eventually saw Kenya elected to host the 1985 women conference. She also assisted in the preparation of a policy on the establishment of the Women's Bureau in the Ministry of Housing and Social Services. As an Assistant Minister in charge of Human Settlements, she prepared and steered the highly competitive negotiations at the Habitat 1 (one) Conference in Vancouver, Canada that brought the UN-Habitat Headquarters to Kenya. Last but not least, Julia has been an elected Member of Parliament for Busia Central Constituency for two consecutive terms, 1974-1979 and 1979-1983 and between 2003 and 2007 she was a nominated member of Parliament under the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) party. At the time of the interview, Julia was the National Chairperson of the Labour Party of Kenya, and the candidate elect running mate of the Orange Democratic Movement – Kenya (ODM-K) for the 2007 General Elections.

Mumbi Ngaru, Prof. Ruth Oniang'o and Dr. Esther Keino all noted that they got into politics by accident or by default. Although Mumbi did apply for nomination, she noted that she had not quite thought that she would get into politics. An opportunity arose when the Social Democratic Party advertised for

nominations and because she knew Mrs. Charity Ngilu was the leader, she was encouraged to apply. She associates her nomination to Charity Ngilu who was keen to have capable women in the council.

Ruth noted that she joined politics by default. “I had not even applied - I just got a call from KANU”. She noted that she took the position knowing well that she would focus on democracy and wouldn’t become anyone’s parrot. Ruth however noted that she had always done development work.

*I have a 17 year old NGO which deals with dairy cattle. My campaign slogan is ‘a cow for every family. The cow is given through women- every family gets the cow through the woman.*

True to her word, Ruth did not seem to parrot any party wishes throughout her five years in Parliament. She focused on issues and kept away from party politics. Even at the time of the interview which was only about three months to the election, she had not yet identified which party she would seek election on although she was pretty sure she was running, and was also very confident about her victory. Unfortunately, political parties became a key factor in the 2007 election, and Ruth was one of the casualties for being in the ‘wrong’ party.

Dr. Esther Keino, an academic by profession also said that she got into politics by accident:

*I didn’t apply to get nominated and I was not quite active in it so to me it came as a surprise ... I couldn’t imagine myself in politics because I had never aspired to be a politician. I didn’t even know what was expected of me as a nominated MP. I had never thought about it or anticipated it or aspired to be a politician, I used to support other candidates at home and no other women have stood in the four districts of the Kipsigis ... so for sure I really didn’t know what to expect and actually it threatened me because I wasn’t sure.*

‘I got into politics by accident, by default’ is a common feature amongst women leaders and even in other management positions. Although there are studies that have shown many women who get into leadership or senior management positions through career planning and preparation, there are equally many studies that have indicate that many women ascend into senior positions by surprise,

without any direct planning. One such study by Onsongo (2005) which focused on women managers in Kenyan Universities showed that some of the women saw their promotions as a 'big surprise'. Although they were qualified, they had not directly planned to become leaders. Appointment into senior positions is common in universities where the Vice Chancellor has powers to do so. In Onsongo's study (ibid) all except for one of the men and women managers had been appointed by the VC. Men tend to lobby more for such appointments than women and as Onsongo notes, women do occasionally get elected although it may be more in situations where the men decide they should settle for a woman. This settling for a woman may have different implications where men want a leader they can manipulate or in one case in Onsongo's study, the woman was elected as a compromise candidate. This compromise candidate factor was also mentioned in a similar study by Kamau (2007). Women waiting for chance, surprise, accident, nominations to get into positions of leadership may itself explain the few numbers of women in these positions. Social cultural factors may also make women to simply fear or avoid getting into politics as the whole game is designed to fit the masculine structure.

Priscah Ouma who was the mayor of Kisumu at the time of the interview said that she developed interest in politics while still a young woman when she worked as Tom Mboya's<sup>6</sup> secretary. She said that she saw how Mboya handled people's problems and she admired that. At that time she did not imagine herself being a politician. Later when she worked with BAT in Kisumu, people would comment 'maybe one day you will become a politician.'

In general the stories of these women leaders exhibit a strong background that grounds their leadership abilities. There are those who from a young age present a strong resolve of their intention and/or destiny to become political leaders, conforming to the concept of leaders being "born". There are others whose entry into political leadership is self described as "accidental" coming as a factor not of their own doing. However, even among these "default" candidates, there are those who have exhibited exemplary leadership tenacity in their careers, i.e. "made" leaders.

Nevertheless, whichever 'type' or 'character' you refer to, their personal capacity and ability to lead is self evident in their descriptive backgrounds.

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<sup>6</sup> Mboya was a very popular post-independence leader who was politically assassinated as he posed the greatest threat to Jomo Kenyatta's leadership due to his popularity. He is a national hero and a Luo legend.

These backgrounds may be academic, family bred or personality based, but nevertheless point at each of the interviewed candidates preparation, capacity and ability for leadership.

### **Passion, Vision and Motivation**

Schlesinger (1966) argues that the accountability of democratically-elected politicians to citizens is ensured because individual politicians are ambitious. Schlesinger (ibid.) argues that ambitious politicians act on the interests of their voters because doing so aids them in their own desire for advancement.

By “vision” we mean not only an inspirational perspective, but more generally how people “see”: how they focus, frame and visualize situations. This includes their historical frame of reference, and thus the range of causal factors that they are aware of and their criteria for progress and possibility; and how they decide who is one of “us”<sup>7</sup> .

The women leaders interviewed elicited a mixed response of motivators or ambition for political leadership. Besides Keino, all the other respondents alluded to a socialized power factor in describing their motivations for their involvement in politics. Esther, an aspirant for the Limuru seat noted that her motivation was grounded on her experiences of women’s marginalization that she witnessed when she was growing up. She actually pursued a career in social work where she could help to reduce women’s vulnerability as she noted:

*In the last 11 years I have invested my own intellectual capacity and money to build an organization that has supported grassroots women and given them a voice. As I have worked with women, I realized that our biggest struggle has been, that, not many people at the political front are able to embrace those capacities that women have. I feel that I am getting into politics to be able to offer that opportunity. That I am going to be there as a representative of the forces of the many girls and women that I really value and I have seen they have a huge capacity in whatever they do. As an MP I believe I can do even more for women and girls (Esther, Parliamentary Aspirant).*

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<sup>7</sup> Values, Vision, Proposals and Networks: Using Ideas in Leadership for Human Development - The Approach of Mah-bub ul Haq (Des Gasper, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague) GARNET Working Paper: No 24/07 August 2007

Esther hoped to use this passion to support women and girls as a tool that would help people to openly speak and contribute to whatever they care about: ‘I want to be the person who will provide Limuru people with the ability to unleash their own leadership capacity’.

The researcher, coming from Limuru, had an opportunity to receive feedback from constituents who interacted with Esther. They indicated that she was the only aspirant addressing long term development issues unlike the others who were focusing on short term cosmetic projects simply to woo people to vote for them. Informal discussions with the constituents after the election, where Esther performed dismally, revealed that she did not manage to reach as many people as the man who won the seat. It was also mentioned that her resources were rather limited compared to over ten male aspirants who obviously reduced her chances of making a real impact.

The women’s rights agenda was also passionately shared by Adelina Mwau. Having worked as a gender programme officer with Oxfam, she realized that issues relating to women were never articulated at policy level. She thus decided to bring her experience of working with grassroots groups to work out policies that were gender and poor people sensitive. Adelina, a co-founder and member of the Coalition of Violence Against Women (COVAW) specifically realized that though policies and laws are very crucial in guiding sectoral concerns, her assessment of the laws that are used or govern issues around gender based violence appeared gender blind. Furthermore, the legal fraternity and service providers (such as police, prosecutors, judges and doctors) were similarly unaware about the differential gender impact of violence. This revelation further catapulted her interest in seeking political leadership in the national assembly. She realized that she needed to: ‘become the voice for women and especially (assist in) coming up with the structures, policies and laws that are particularly sensitive to women issues’.

Adelina was very passionate about seeing that women are in positions of power at all levels, in order to bring a new way of looking at leadership. Over the years, she has supported women’s participation via training, mentorship, and providing support systems suitable for encouraging women leaders to take up their mantles. She would wish to see more women as models of an alternative kind of leadership which has a “feminine aspect”, one that can be said to be different in terms of dealing with the issues such as corruption, transparency and

being able to bring leadership that is inclusive of all the young men and women, able and disabled, rich and poor.

Christine Mango's motivation to engage as a leader emanated from her long lived experiences. As many women lecturers in Kenya's public universities would attest to, not only do women enter the teaching profession at the universities in smaller numbers but they obtain promotions much less frequently. Only a handful of female academics get promoted to the highest academic ranks compared to their male colleagues. This has been attested in many studies in Kenyan Universities for example (Chege & Namusonge, 2006; Kamau, 2001, 2006a; Manya, 2000; Onsongo, 2000, 2005). Christine recalled her experiences at Maseno University where she worked even on her maternity bed, writing reports and meeting departmental deadlines, but never received due recognition through promotion. At the same time, her contemporaries of equal or lesser experience or qualification advanced with exponential speed. She underwent intense frustration, harassment and disparagement from her male colleagues and superiors during her tenure as the Director of the Centre for the Study of Lake Victoria and its Environs (CSOLVE), but she stood firm for almost a decade.

This made her question whether it was she who was "never good enough or whether society does not recognize us?" She was also motivated by her peers, having studied alongside Hon. Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate at Loreto Convent, Limuru and seeing her suffer public and personal ridicule in her fight for the underprivileged. She remembers questioning herself and her contribution to society, wondering whether her teaching and developing human resources was all she could give in return. These, coupled with the great poverty and squalor that she observed in her constituency, despite its economic resources convinced her of the need to participate in political leadership. As humble as she is courageous, Christine noted that she "may not be a messiah, but maybe, in my own way, I could do something".

As a politician, Christine's biggest passion in her constituency is the girl child and the orphans. She had introduced various Parliamentary motions about the girl child. She successfully ensured the passing of one motion that would fast track girl child education in Kenya, as well as one to have government support for orphaned children. Her facts were clear and they guided her conviction for these vulnerable groups. During the interview, she had the statistics of the situation in Butula Constituency at her finger tips on issues that she felt were

most crucial in her constituency. Sadly, Christine lost her aspiration for a second term in Parliament during party nominations.

Julia's motivation for political work stems from her experience in public health with rural mothers. This grassroots experience motivated her personal and academic zeal to attain the necessary competence and skills. She felt that her interaction with communities was natural as she noted:

*I just merged with the community and lived with them from house to house, family to family, counselling mothers, enjoying, advising them and also making sure the children were being looked after properly (Julia, Nominated MP).*

But this localized experience did not suffice. She felt that she needed to join political leadership and contribute to changes from the top-down. This interest was further reinforced by her constituents who requested her to engage in the region's effort to rid itself of the bad leadership and poor development record that they had experienced for far too long. Interestingly, in their plea to her, the constituents referred to her successes as a role model not only for themselves but also for their children. They called upon her to still continue her research, but engage in leadership to assist their communities develop, imagining that she had the ability to do both tasks simultaneously. This she did in consultation with her community elders and opinion leaders, eventually emerging the first woman member of parliament and one of the lime lights of women's leadership in Kenya today.

Julia's passion is thus to contribute to that quality aspect of human beings that would cause the community, society to derive the best from individuals, i.e. quality of life for all. - This means total development so that individuals can maximally contribute to the economic development, to the social growth, spiritual enhancement. "I just like seeing a healthy person, a person who feels they can give their best of everything."

Though Keino and Ruth, both nominated members of Parliament had not explicitly professed a fervent ambition or interest in engaging in political leadership, they nevertheless proffered that since their surprisingly unanticipated appointment to the ninth Parliament, their passion for political leadership was ignited. Both had decided they would vie for the 2007 elections. Although she did not view

herself as a politician, Keino had done a great deal of work at the Egerton University which included starting a gender centre, and a mentoring programme for young school girls, a project that was in partnership with the University of Hull, United Kingdom. As a nominated MP she became involved in grass root work outside of academia and was happy with what she had achieved with women groups. She was proud to have helped many women undergo training on various aspects of development, poverty eradication, education and gender based violence. Keino had established the Rift Valley Women Empowerment Network to build the capacities of civic and Parliamentary women candidates for the 2007 general elections. She felt that women should not get into politics by chance but through training and preparation so that they would manage the challenges that go with political office. She had also spearheaded such training prior to the 2002 elections, a factor that may have contributed to her nomination.

Ruth had been an active community development worker even before the nomination. She has been running a local non-governmental organization dealing with dairy cattle for the last 17 years, and expressed great passion about poverty eradication, education, dairy farming and gender based violence.

Mumbi N'garu, former Mayor of Thika Municipal Council<sup>8</sup> though perceiving her entry into politics as accidental (having been nominated by the Social Democratic Party (SDP), she noted that once in office, her initial passion was to transform the Municipal Council of Thika that had been denigrated by many years of mismanagement. Though she was anxious about the murky reputation of “politics”, she had the requisite experience as a community conscious enthusiast to want to “give it a try”. As her interview later reveals, she did more than just try.

Mumbi's greatest passion as a politician is to serve and to transform. She noted that before she joined Thika Municipal Council, her only experience with councils was as a student at the University. While undertaking a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and Administration, she attended to council business on research purposes while on student attachment. Thereafter, her only relationship with the council was when paying bills like water, land rates and business licenses, and

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<sup>8</sup> 1997 to 2002

like everybody else she criticized the performance of the council. When she was elected as Mayor, she really wanted to make a difference. According to Mumbi, at the time she became Mayor of Thika, the Council's performance was as poor as many others. Salaries had not been paid for several months, workers were on strike and militant groups were in control of the public transport system. She however had the resolve to serve, a resolve she still holds to date, and one that she believes led to her making a mark in Thika leadership.

Nyiva Mwendwa went into Parliament in 1974. She made her decision to join politics in 1972 while still teaching at the University of Nairobi as an Assistant Lecturer. She elicited only personal ambition as her motivation for political leadership, not attributing her desire to a passion or desire to change any social or personal injustice she had experienced or affiliated to. Nyiva was married into a wealthy family which could explain the difference in motivation between her and the other women who may have experienced poverty first hand. Upon her return from the United States where she was undertaking a master's degree, she immediately decided to go into politics, at 32 years of age. Her husband would later take over as Member of Parliament for Kitui West. When asked whether she had an agreement with her husband to run in the same constituency, her response was quite surprising, if not awe inspiring for women politicians everywhere. They did in fact discuss the position with her late husband Kitili Mwendwa, and agreed that since she was the "better politician", she should make her attempt at political leadership first<sup>9</sup>. This is a radically different position to many instances of spouses taking over their counterpart's roles in politics in Kenya.

The typical occurrence is that wives make attempts at political leadership after their husband's departures, as was the case with Mary Ngoyoni (unsuccessful aspirant in the 2006 Laisamis by election occasioned by the death of her husband, Titus Ngoyoni); Jayne Kihara (Naivasha taking over from her husband, Paul Kihara); and Sarah Godana (unsuccessful aspirant in the 2006 North Horr by-election after the death of her husband, Bonaya Godana) usually in a bid to piggyback on their husband's legacies. Christine, who has been mentioned in this study, noted that politics was her husband's field and she only got in after he had passed away.

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<sup>9</sup> Hon. Nyiva Mwendwa won the Kitui West Parliamentary seat in 1974, beating Parmenas Nzilu Munyasia who was the incumbent representative from independence in 1963. Hon. Kitili Mwendwa, Nyiva's husband would later take the seat in 1984.

From these examples, it can be argued that there is no uniform way in which women get into politics. Some women may get into it by accident while others may do so through careful thought and plan to get into politics because they believe that as legislators they can bring the desired change. The common denominator amongst all the women was their desire to help the women folk to become better off. Several of these women had experienced firsthand, the challenges that girls faced, and they wanted to do something about it. The visions and passion seemed to be clearly focused on womens' and girls' issues.

From the foregoing it is quite apparent that these women's motivation for political leadership is led by their conviction to change the lives of their communities, but more so women and the socially excluded groups. They have personally and by proxy experienced the inequalities of the social system, from the glass ceilings to the unrecognized care work of women. The issues that the women pointed out range from poverty especially as it affects women and girls to gender blind policy considerations, mismanagement of community institutions to their experiences in community plight and disease.

### **What Projects Do Women Give Priority To?**

We analysed the women leader's development priorities using the human development approach. This approach involves creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. People are the real wealth of nations, thus development is about expanding the choices people have to lead lives that they value<sup>10</sup>.

The women leaders interviewed were particularly keen on improving the underprivileged lot in their respective societies. They were concentrating on the value of life, from the basics of good health and nutrition, to the impacts of the spread of disease; the underprivileged in society such as orphans, the provision of water, to the human rights of women. This is the path that women's leadership seems to follow, a path that must be nurtured and encouraged. These interests can be construed as "feminine", since they appeal to the maternal nature of the leaders interviewed.

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<sup>10</sup> As of 1990, the human development concept was applied to a systematic study of global themes, as published in the yearly global Human Development Reports under the auspice of the UNDP. The work of Amartya Sen and others provided the conceptual foundation for an alternative and broader human development approach defined as a process of enlarging people's choices and enhancing human capabilities (the range of things people can be and do) and freedoms, enabling them to: live a long and healthy life, have access to knowledge and a decent standard of living, and participate in the life of their community and decisions affecting their lives.

From our interviews, it can be construed that women's leadership adopts a human development paradigm. All the women interviewed except Nyiva seemed to adhere to the human development approach in the projects that they had given highest priority in the areas they represented and nationally. Nyiva was the only one who responded to the question about her projects with the shortest answer. For example, when asked about which projects she had given priority to with her CDF, she said 'in these five years, I have used my CDF for water and also for schools and health facilities'. The lack of detail is clear on comparing the response with that given by Adelina a nominated MP, without access to CDF and who hails from Ukambani, hence with similar challenges to Nyiva's place:

*Water has been my passion because as a young woman growing up in my village, in a hilly place, I know what it means to carry 20 litres - 3 times a day. Thank God, I went to school and I was able to build a water tank for my mother. So it has been a passion and a vision to see women's work reduced by bringing water close to them. So far I've been able to lobby as well as initiate 2 water projects in two locations through the trust fund. I've been able to get 7.8 million for a big water project that will be pumped to several institutions; as well as another water project i.e., a borehole that cost the Government, Kshs. 7 million. Am still continuing to make sure that water is distributed to several villages. I've been able to lobby for electricity in 3 projects, all of which will cost the government almost 30 million and I am hoping they will be completed this year (Adelina, nominated MP).*

These government projects have been due to Adelina's lobbying for the needs of her constituency, yet she was not elected. Similarly Prisca (Kisumu Mayor) also eloquently explained about the projects she had facilitated in Kisumu and her ward in particular

*My number one project has been poverty eradication through women's groups. I helped identify an organisation called Pamoja Trust to help women learn how to save as well as develop a merry go round scheme amongst themselves so that they alleviate poverty. This project has benefited very many women's groups in Kisumu (Prisca, Mayor).*

Mumbi's passion for education as a Mayor were clearly expressed in the interview:

*My first priority as a Mayor was education. Can you believe that for three years in a row when I was Mayor, Thika municipality was number one in Central Province? I am passionate about education and when I went to schools to talk to these pupils I never went there with the authority of the Mayor; I went there as a parent and they all thought of me as a role model. It might have been something very small but every year, I signed success cards for all the schools in the municipality which were delivered by the civic driver. During parade when the cards were read out by the standard 8 pupils, I was told that their faces looked just great - that was truly motivating (Mumbi, Thika Mayor).*

The other women expressed similar passion for human development projects all in line with the issues they had raised as their passion and motivator for being in politics. For Christine Mango, her priority projects were:

*“For me the priorities are education, health, water and roads. In education, I’ve already put up a girl’s secondary school, and a second one is coming up. I have also put up two boys secondary schools, and in addition I have bought land and am in the process of buying another 50 acres of land which will house an orphan rescue centre but eventually become a university college. I’ve already put up four dispensaries which are complete. I am putting up a maternity in one of the health centres. As you are well aware our area has HIV and AIDS, malaria and Typhoid so it’s a priority area, and I have managed to talk to Hon. Ngilu. We got an ambulance for the district hospital which has become a centre for Anti-Retroviral distribution by Moi University in conjunction with Indiana University in the project known as AMPA. This is one of its kind because they give medicine, food and economic support...” (Christine, elected MP)*

Christine described her work for almost half an hour going into details of how she had played a big role in encouraging people to go for HIV testing. She would attend public meetings to educate people herself:

*I am very passionate about HIV and AIDS; I go to meetings where women talk to me because am a woman. They say to me “Mama Mango, please get us medication so that our children who are one year old can get to 8 years old, at least then we can hand them over to*

*someone else”. This really touched me and after contacting the Ministry for help, I got someone from the American Embassy to visit and see the health facilities because the patients had to go to Busia which is 40 kilometers away. The opening of the sub-district hospital is a big help to the people. ...When this group came I too was tested in the VCT bed so that I could encourage people to come for the test” (Christine, Elected MP).*

Regarding water projects she said that she had promised herself and her people that once they elected her she would revive some shallow wells that had been drilled in the 1980’s when her husband had been the MP. However, as a result of bad politics the wells had all dried up due to lack of maintenance. Once she was elected she noted:

*We identified all these wells and I have organised major projects to have all of them operating again. I want to give people clean piped water so that women won’t have to carry jerry cans on their heads and backs. I always make a joke that my neck is short because of the days of carrying water on my head. (Christine, Elected MP).*

Christine had also helped to build classrooms, had acquired a grader to clear rural access roads, and had supported income generating projects especially for women. The researcher found Christine very committed to development work and was actually surprised that publicly not much had been reported about her. She was very clear of what needed to be done and she spent time with her people in meetings discussing their needs and what they wanted done with their CDF. It was disappointing that she lost in the ODM nominations for this year’s election. This takes us back to the issue raised earlier in this section – as to what makes constituents view one as a good leader.

In the case of Esther, as aspirant, she was asked which projects she would give priority to if she were elected. Esther’s response is compared to a male aspirant in the same constituency. Esther’s priority would be (these are some extracts from a very long response:

*“My first priority in Limuru will be to do a strategic plan that is community led and therefore I wouldn’t want to assume that I have preset ideas. I can tell you that during the ground campaign I have*

*changed my mind on what I thought was a priority...I have discovered that people have priorities...There are lots of impassable roads in Limuru, that would be a priority. The other thing I would do is invest in projects to empower schools ...I've been to schools where 5 children are sitting in one desk ...For example, there are some schools in Limuru where desks are kept in stores while in others there are no desks – surely something can be done about that...I would invest in reviving a lot of the small scale business opportunities – markets which I believe would benefit women. In my home village when I was growing up, the whole market used to be full on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Today, only 5 women are selling and it's just that people cannot be motivated, I would encourage the business people and work with them in a way to open up Limuru for the markets that exist in Nairobi and be able to be counted as the district headquarters so that even the community are able to supply their own goods...” (Esther, MP Aspirant).*

Esther went on to explain the details of what she would do about health services especially those that are women friendly. She also talked about some parts of the constituency that have major water problems she would work on. However, the point she stressed most is the fact that she would allow people to make priorities. She also did not assume that development in general would benefit all people equally, she was aware of the need to have women specific and gender sensitive planning and budgeting otherwise women will continue to be worse off even with economic growth being recorded in general. Local markets for example would help women most as they are more handicapped in terms of taking their goods to Nairobi. She especially acknowledged the vulnerability of older women who used to benefit from vibrant markets. I found her approach clearly gender sensitive.

Esther would clearly have a human development approach to her work similar to Christine's shared earlier on. The other women whose responses, are not quoted here had similar approaches to development. This approach calls for politics and political institutions to promote human development and safeguard the freedom and dignity of all people. This is the path that the women leaders interviewed with one exception seemed to follow, a path that is worth nurturing and encouraging. It is a path that needs more publicity through such studies that will make the public aware of the womens' style of leadership.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The findings in this initial study show that women develop their vision of leadership from experiences they faced as young girls growing in a society with major gender inequalities. When they get into politics, women's priority was guided by their vision to see a world where men and women and all other people who may be vulnerable get equal opportunities. The majority of the women were drawn to the human development approach in the projects that they supported.

The depth of information gathered from such a small number of women leaders was quite surprising because very little if any of what women leaders do get to the public domain. In the 9th Parliament for example, the only women who the public perceived to be active were those with ministerial positions, namely Charity Ngilu, Martha Karua and Linah Jebii Kilimo for the short time she served as Minister. Beth Mugo as an Assistant Minister in the Education docket also attracted some coverage. Besides Njoki Ndung'u who gained a lot of publicity due to her sexual offences Bill, the other women were basically unknown to the public.

This is an indication that more research is required especially in areas like politics where the stereotypes still hold strong that women are not as effective political leaders as men. Christine and Keino pulled the biggest surprise. Keino for instance is on record for having not made a maiden speech, an issue that the media negatively highlighted on various occasions. The researcher did ask her why she never spoke to which she said that being very new in Parliament she needed to spend time to understand how things were done. She however noted that she was a member of the Parliamentary orders committee which is chaired by the Speaker. She noted that it rarely met but in the few meetings, she had managed to challenge some of gender imbalances embedded in the rules of Parliament. For example she challenged the use of the term 'Mr Speaker Sir'- as though the speaker would always be male. It would do no harm to just refer to the office as Speaker. She further noted that Parliamentary rules were basically gender blind and as Njoki Ndung'u once stated, 'Parliament feels like a big secondary school of naughty boys with a few girls in there'. Before the 9th Parliament there had never even been thought of maternity leave since no women had given birth while there. This time two women MPs got babies and rules had to be made ad hoc. A maternity policy for women MPs is yet to be finalised.

This study also showed that without doubt, majority of the women focus on human development issues e.g. education, health, children, nutrition, women's income, water and other injustices that affect women and girls differently. The human development approach was clearly the path that women in this study had taken. It is an approach that is gender sensitive, it leaves people free to determine their destinies and participate in decisions that shape their lives.

When women stay in politics for so long and especially if they continue to be a minority, they may undergo a process of 'masculinisation' where they learn to do things in the traditional, masculine and patriarchal ways. They may find it very hard to challenge the 'menstream' issues and find it easier to conform i.e. 'if you can't beat them, join them'. Due to the small representation of women in predominantly male organisations, they may be subjected to treatment that compromises the contributions they could make as politicians.

However, looking at the issues, almost all the women interviewed said that they had passion for and had focused on, is an indication that if there is a critical mass of women in political leadership and women who support the course of gender equality and justice, then much more can be achieved towards development that takes on board gender issues.

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## Chapter Two

# **Practicing Politics: the Female Side of the Coin - Enhancing Womens' Political Participation in the Imminent General Elections of 2007**

By Prof. Jacqueline Adhiambo Oduol, PhD

## Introduction

In this article, I share some ideas that are intended to explain how women in Kenya play politics and how they are affected by the political climate in the country. This is what *'practicing politics: the female side of the coin'* means to me. Various sources inform ideas that I share in this paper, on ways in which politics is carried out in Kenya and how women should engage for greater effectiveness and impact. These include research that has been done in a number of countries around the world; documented experiences by women politicians; advocacy work by women activists and my own practical experience with the political process in Kenya and the African Region. This has been - especially as a technical expert reviewing and engendering political manifestos, carrying out civic education and training women parliamentary and civic seat aspirants.

I argue that the obstacles preventing women from becoming members of Parliament in Kenya are similar to those raised in a number of countries such as Indonesia, Zambia, Rwanda and India. Let us consider the following factors as influencing the patterns of recruitment of men and women as legislators in Indonesia:

- The cultural context is still heavily patriarchal. The common perception is that the political arena is for men, and that it is less preferable for women to become legislators.
- The selection of candidates by political parties is usually done by a small group of officials or party leaders, almost always men. Male political leaders have a disproportionate influence over party politics and women do not receive much support.
- The media is yet to effectively mobilize the public regarding the importance of women's representation in parliament.
- Despite the existence of women's organizations fighting for the goal of increased representation of women; there is little effective networking among these organizations, NGOs and political parties towards this common goal.
- Poverty and the low levels of education of women make it difficult to recruit women who have political capabilities that would allow them to compete on an equal basis with men.
- Women with families often experience obstacles, in particular opposition from their spouses (*and in-laws*)<sup>11</sup>. Political activities usually

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<sup>11</sup>My addition

require large investments of time and money, and many women hold positions that are not rewarding financially.

- The large number of political parties contesting elections and winning seats in parliament can affect the level of representation of women. As political parties receive a limited number of seats in the legislature, these tend to be divided among male candidates who tend to be ranked at the top of the party election list<sup>12</sup>.

The thoughts I share focus on the challenges that women face in elective politics in the context that I call the art and science of practicing politics: *'selecting yourself'*, *'being selected by the party'* and *'getting elected'*<sup>13</sup>. I then identify the elements that I consider key to transforming the political climate in favour of women, showing in each case the hindrances that women must handle through the key elements. Finally, I demonstrate how this is linked to what I call the art and science of political engagement and conclude my presentation by looking at how women in Kenya have addressed the obstacles and share what I think every woman who seeks to engage in active politics must not forget.

## **The Art and Science of Politics**

Politics can be defined as the art of taking a position and then mobilizing, persuading and organizing the majority of people to support that position. The important thing is to get more than 50% of the vote on your side as a candidate. It can be argued that politics is about building an image of yourself and of those who support your position as the popular and win-oriented position. It is the women and men who manage to get even one more extra person on their side that are declared winners. For this reason politics is an art that calls for sophisticated creativity and innovation in relation to candidate identification and branding, candidate packaging and advertisement. It involves getting an image of your vision and candidature and then ensuring that you get as many people as possible to buy into this image. As Matland (2005) points out, this must be done at all the crucial stages of the campaign process namely: (a) Selecting Yourself (b) Being Selected by the Party and (c) Getting Elected.

But politics is also a science in the sense that there is predictable knowledge of how the game is played based on facts that can be proved and tested. One can say that political practice is a matter that rests on fundamental principles and practices, which

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<sup>12</sup>Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers A Revised Edition IDEA (2005)

<sup>13</sup>A categorization that I take from Richard E. Matland in his article 'Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems (2005)

are predictable. This would mean that it is possible to look at a candidate, analyze the candidates profile, character and candidature (constituency party ticket/affiliation, party policy) and predict fairly accurately the candidates' chances of success.

In other words, politics is a game which one either knows or doesn't. It is therefore fundamental that women who join politics acquire and exploit knowledge of how it works. From this perspective we see that the female practicing politics in preparation for the 2007 elections in Kenya must in addition to her charisma and personal initiative and drive take note of specific facts that obtain at each of the three stages identified above and manage them appropriately.

### **The Art - Selecting Yourself**

In this first stage of selecting oneself, personal, ambition, resources and opportunities to stand play a crucial role. It is not surprising that this stage usually has more men than women engaging due to political socialization.

*Men across virtually all cultures, are socialized to see politics as a legitimate sphere for them to act in. This leads to men having a greater knowledge of and interest in politics, and greater political ambition. They also have access to more resources. In virtually every country women start out as more than 50 per cent of those eligible to serve, but even after just the first step of selecting themselves, the system is starting to become skewed towards men”(Matland 2002:94).*

Thus women who select themselves must deliberately cultivate a strong sense of self conviction that they are up to the task of being the area member of parliament or civic leader.

### **The Science – Selecting Yourself**

It is common knowledge that political parties will only support candidates who they believe have a high chance of winning. Therefore women candidates must consciously work to create an image of 'a winner'. They shouldn't assume that the party will nominate them on account of the party's gender policy simply because they are women. Female candidates must identify critical partners such as women's organizations, religious leaders and opinion leaders and ensure they buy into their political undertaking. Women's organizations focusing on women's

political empowerment as well as and other organizations can “*provide women with experience in public settings, help build their self-confidence and provide a support base if a woman decides to contest an election*”. The organizations can also pressure parties to address women’s issues and to address the question of women’s increased political representation. “These are important resources a woman can draw on and they make it more likely that she will stand and that the party apparatus will see her as a viable candidate.” (Matland, 2005:95)

### **The Art - Being Selected By the Party**

The second stage, being selected by the party is of special concern to women given that Kenya does not yet have provision for independent candidates. The majority of women candidates usually do a sterling job of developing a message for their campaign, disseminating the message and embarking on a rigorous campaign with passion and determination. These efforts often fail to realize the desired goal when such candidates ignore party politics as an important ‘stand alone’ aspect that has its own do’s and don’ts. The female politician who wants to succeed must invest in understanding the culture and practice of her party and deliberately plan how to manage it. Although nomination procedures vary across countries and parties it is generally agreed that certain conditions have a predictable impact on women. As an example, clear procedures for selecting candidates have a more distinct advantage for women:

*In a patronage based system there are far less likely to be clear rules, and even when they exist there is a distinct possibility that they will not be followed carefully. Authority is based on either traditional or charismatic leadership rather than legal-rational authority. Loyalty to those in power in the party is paramount...When the rules are unwritten it becomes much harder (for women) to devise a strategy to break into the circle of power. (Ibid.2005:95-96).*

With adequate understanding of the procedure of the party, the woman candidate must then commit to engage articulately and to communicate effectively.

## The Science - Being Selected By the Party

It is clear that “if certain types of candidates are seen as a liability, gatekeepers will shy away from nominating them” (Ibid. 2005:97). Research from different countries of the world (Japan, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, France, and Saudi Arabia) show that there is a set of characteristics that party selectors look for in possible candidates.

*The most widely valued characteristic is the aspirant’s track record in the party organization and in the constituency. Even for new candidates, a past history of party participation and activism is important, although not a requirement. Visibility in the community either through one’s profession, the holding of public office, or leadership positions in civil society organizations is also highly desirable. (Matland, 2005:97)*

Although political parties have the power to compensate for the skewed nature of their pool of aspirants through quotas or other party rules, which can achieve gender equality, this does not usually happen. Parties often adopt gender-neutral nominating rules making the pool selected skewed towards men. In a number of cases, parties actually use selection procedures that hurt women<sup>14</sup> making the pool even more skewed towards men.

## The Art - Getting Elected

Being chosen by voters is the final barrier to becoming a member of parliament for women. While there is debate as to whether the voters display a systematic bias against women, with a number of people arguing that the electorate (especially the 2007 one in Kenya) actually favors women, politics is still considered a male area. While studies from established democracies suggest that voters vote primarily for party label rather than individual candidates, in Kenya the patriarchal character of the party and the opinion leaders in the community combine to make the woman invisible and lock her out of getting elected. Candidates must therefore remember the importance of managing themselves at the individual level given known cultural challenges that women face in politics. As researchers point out:

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<sup>14</sup>Available statistics and candidate testimonials demonstrate this is what happened in the 2002 elections resulting in a situation where a number of women were forced to shift party affiliations after they were unfairly locked out at the nomination stage.

*Even if objectively the individual characteristics of candidates do not matter to the electorate, party officials are convinced that they are important. They will therefore continue to choose candidates carefully with an eye to those who they believe will strengthen the parties' chances of winning votes." (2005:96)*

## **The Science - Getting Elected**

Considerable evidence from research shows that female candidates do as well as male candidates when directly facing the voters. However given the tendency by voters to place more emphasis on party label rather than individual candidates, and since parties are male dominated, the most crucial matter for the female candidate at this stage is to understand the process and conditions that enable a candidate to actually get nominated by the party. Thus the woman who selects herself for political office must generate and implement a win-oriented strategy to generate confidence that can convince the party to choose her as its candidate.

## **Key Elements in the Transformation of Politics for Women**

Women's experience of political engagement to date shows that effective measures that tackle the issues identified and help to transform the climate in favour of women's participation include very specific elements. These are: *empowerment, self-confidence, political awareness and affirmation of identity.*

It is only when women are aware that their strength not only comes from their numbers but also from their knowledge and mastery of the political game, can they develop these elements and effectively break into the world of politics in numbers large enough to change the climate. A critical mass of women is necessary to challenge the political, socio-economic and ideological and psychological hindrances so that women politicians can make a meaningful difference. It is with such knowledge that women may learn how not to be distracted from their goal of gaining political power by "majoring in minors" and engaging sidekicks where they fight among themselves or remain confined to 'women's wings or leagues' as is often the case now.

To achieve gender balance in political life, women of Kenya need to ensure that individually, as well as collectively, they understand and remain committed to the key elements of transformation namely empowerment, self-confidence, political

awareness and affirmation of identity. Women need to pay special attention to the political, socio-economic as well as ideological and psychological obstacles which feature prominently and greatly affect their participation in politics as I discuss in the following section.

### **The Prevalence of the ‘Masculine Model’ of Political Life and of Elected Government Bodies**

The major political obstacles include:

- Lack of party support, for example, limited financial support for women candidates, limited access to political networks, and the more stringent standards and qualifications applied to women;
- Lack of sustained contact and cooperation with other public organizations such as trade (labor) unions and women’s groups;
- Lack of access to well developed education and training systems for women’s leadership in general, and for orienting young women towards political life; and
- The very nature of the electoral system, which may or may not be favorable to women candidates.

These obstacles are well summarized in this quote:

*“Men largely dominate the political arena; formulate the rules of the political game; and often define the standards for evaluation. Furthermore, political life is organized according to male norms, and values and even male life-styles. For instance, politics is often based on the ideas of ‘winners and losers’, competition and confrontation, rather than systematic collaboration and consensus, especially across part lines. It may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male style politics. Thus when women do participate they tend to do so in small numbers.” (Matland, 2005:34)*

The dilemma arising from this masculine model is that women are expected to be asexual in their speech and manners and not be open about their feminine nature:

*In fact the more authoritative and ‘manly’ a woman is, the more she corresponds to the undeclared male rules of the game. That is why*

*some women politicians in general have to overcome the difficulty of feeling uncomfortable in the political field, as though they are some where they do not belong (Ibid: 35)*

If women have to make a breakthrough into politics they will need to find their own way of engaging and ensure that each woman can develop a strong personality as a woman and a politician. The best way to achieve this is to sensitize women to support other women, especially those in politics. Thus, women in active politics as well as those who want to support them should see training as an important part of their empowerment. The key lies in training women to achieve balance of their different sides and potential – the ‘male-assertive, confident’ side; the mother-nurturing, caring and protective side and the girl-obedient, faithful, loyal and nice side. This is the only way that a woman politician can reach a level where she is not ‘apologetic’ either for her own womanhood or for betraying her sense of womanhood when she engages in the business of politics.

Women politicians will not be able to accommodate these clashing expectations until they learn to reconcile (or make the choice between) certain collective images, dominant stereotypes and their own feminine nature. Women also need to understand that since their empowerment challenges traditional ideas of male authority and supremacy, they should not be surprised that women’s political empowerment has been opposed by some men.

### **The Socio-Economic Obstacles**

The major socio-economic obstacles include:

- The feminization of poverty and unemployment-
- The dual burden of multiple roles in the domestic and professional front
- Lack of political training

Women’s major concern is survival and they spend much of their time trying to meet the basic needs of families. This makes it particularly difficult for women to participate in political life. This is why the economic empowerment of women, along with education and access to information, is an important way to take women from the constraints of the household to full participation in politics and political elections.

The dual burden where women are called upon to perform multiple roles alongside active politics is also a major challenge. Women carry a disproportionate share of domestic work in Kenya as in most countries. A majority of women have full-time jobs as wives and mothers as well as other careers (teachers, doctors, lawyers). Becoming an MP can therefore be considered a third full-time job. The result is that most women think that they cannot hold a political office along with other responsibilities. This view was refuted by Anna Balleto a former MP of Spain who noted:

*“Women believe that entering parliament means choosing between a private life or a public life. This is not the case. Instead, women should view their life as a continuum. They should decide what they want to achieve in life and prioritize these goals in chronological order. There is a certain right time to achieve each of these goals, whether it is becoming a wife, mother, professional or a parliamentarian. Life is long and women can achieve many things”.*

Many women do not only lack basic education but also have inadequate political training that can enable them participate effectively in the political arena. This leads to a situation where women are not taken seriously even when they declare their candidature.

*It is very difficult for women to talk, to argue, to press for their concerns. How can we encourage women to talk and to express themselves not about politics, but about her problems, her life, issues that concern her? The answer is education. Education has led many women in my society to join political parties or participate in political parties. Education is the most important channel for encouraging women to speak out (Matland, 2005:43)*

## **The Ideological and Psychological Hindrances**

The ideological and psychological hindrances include the traditional roles; lack of confidence; the perception of politics as ‘dirty’ and the role of the media. These factors influence women as contenders and the electorate leading to a tremendous sense of fear of, or ignorance of how the game of politics is played, and therefore how to succeed. Thus women display a tendency to quit and failure to persist to the end of their political projects. Yet we know through the women

who have made it that when women acquire knowledge and engage in political life they succeed. This is why it is said that ‘when women run, women win’.

*With confidence and determination women can reach the highest levels in the political process. That is why women should believe in themselves, and should do away with the widespread perception that men have to be their leaders. Women are equal to and have the same potential as men, but only they can fight for their rights. Women are very good campaigners, organizers and support-mobilizers, but fear sometimes prevents women from contesting elections and from participating in political life” (Matland 2005:45)*

Kenya needs strong women who want to take leadership because they want change. We need female leaders in society who take responsibility. Delight, denial, distress and development are some ideological and psychological hindrances which impact on women. These hindrances take women through some predictable challenges that can be managed more effectively with prior knowledge and preparation. I discuss each of these challenges next.

**Delight:** In this stage you feel nice and happy (as a woman) about your decision to run. It is okay to feel happy and nice about being a leader but you must ensure that you do not stagnate at this stage and settle because feeling nice is a way to suppress women. It’s a way to keep you at the girl stage where your focus is on pleasing people around you; being loyal and obedient to your associates and judging your ability as a leader by being affirmed by those around you. Leadership requires decisiveness and going against the mainstream and (particularly as a woman) you must realize that you cannot lead if you get stuck at the delight stage, with the paramount goal of being nice.

**Denial:** This is the ‘yes-but-stage’ that a woman in political leadership moves to from delight. In this period you need inner dialogue to sort out the conflicting messages resulting from your socialization and personal goals of political achievement. As a woman you are encouraged to compete on an equal basis with men but at another level you are reminded that you must be faithful and loyal because ‘we need you.’ It is very important that as a woman politician you learn to listen to yourself and sort out your conflicts based on your feelings for yourself, your political agenda and your set goal at the time.

**Distress:** This stage is stressful because it reflects the stage where as a woman politician you realize that you have to lose something in order get something. You are likely to lose friends, the support of some family (especially extended), and goodwill of female colleagues who feel betrayed and sometimes envious of your growth. It is critical that you do not withdraw despite the pain and discomfort. You must be ready to confront difficult situations and recognize that you cannot have everything in life and must make some choices. Stay committed to the course and pursuit of your political ambitions because this stage is the key to the next stage of development.

**Development:** Staying on course despite the stress, accepting responsibility and learning to make decisions in difficult moments leads you to accomplish some of your goals. The achievement makes you feel good and propels you to delight and the wheels of practicing politics as a woman roll off as described once again.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, my explanation of why women play politics the way they do, *'practicing politics: the female side of the coin'* it is clear that while politics is male dominated and hostile to women, a woman does not have to become a man to be successful in politics. Politics is a game, which women like other politicians either know or they do not. Women who are aware that the female side of politics raises conflict at the individual, party and society level and who develop their own style of how to effectively handle each level will make positive progress. Each woman must therefore ask and answer questions such as: *What power do I have as a woman leader and politician? What power do I need to have? What power am I able to give to others? Who will I give this power to and why? What power can I give up?*

These calls for a major paradigm shift on efforts and programs that seek to enhance the participation of women in politics in Kenya. It reveals the urgent need to move from the current approach that is heavy on the 'what' (side of female politics (listing the obstacles) without sufficient attention to the 'how' (specific actions that women must take as candidates, organizations, party members and leaders and electorate) given the issues I raise about politics as an art and as a science, especially in the obtaining political climate in Kenya.

Kenyan women must now raise their own consciousness and sustain the transformations and change that has been introduced. And the support of the women's movement in Kenya is critical. While some sections of the women's movement are sceptical about the real value of supporting women aspirants, they are familiar with the vitality and the enthusiasm of the women who have been elected to parliament and civic positions and are now offering both moral and material support. This process is of central importance, and must be continued and reinforced.

I would therefore urge all women who seek political power as well as those who want to transform the political culture in favour of women to remember the following principles critical to the female side of playing politics.

- You cannot fail without your consent and you cannot succeed without your participation. You must decide as a woman that you will exploit the knowledge available to you to participate meaningfully and strategically in political life with your eye on the prize, which is getting elected. You must not consent to failure regardless of the odds against you.
- The value you place on anything in life is immediately revealed by the price you are willing to pay for it. How much time are you as a woman candidate prepared and willing to spend on achieving your political goal? What tools do you have to address the challenges? What are you investing towards your goal? Do you feel you have the requisite energy to see you through the process? If not, what are you doing to ensure that you will acquire this energy?
- Success in politics for women, as with any task in life is not a mystery, it is a journey with clear milestones and women who want to succeed in politics (as contenders, electorate or supporters in women's organization) can work to achieve. As a woman candidate it is necessary for you to be comfortable with your pursuit of power and to find your own style of acquiring, using and retaining power. You have to decide what you will integrate from your many 'sides'- *aggressive male, obedient girl and the nurturing enduring mother.*

A close look at the past, current and emerging trends of political engagement by women as contenders and electorate shows that key political actors (development partners, women politicians and women's organizations) are not doing enough

to support women to manage this ‘how’ side of women’s leadership ambitions. Of significance in this regard is the extent to which the women candidates tap available opportunities to work with political parties, and the extent to which development partners prioritize reflection sessions where women candidates and women’s organizations can listen to one another and review the impact of existing programs on women’s efforts to join elective politics.

Women candidates also need to strengthen strategic networks with women’s organizations and other social networks to invest in and buy into their collective agenda. Vibrant, cohesive and successful women’s organizing occurs when women who come together organize around clearly perceived areas of their collective oppression which then define their common goal and helps chart the path for their collective action. The approach adopted by key actors to date does not enhance women’s capacity to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength through a deliberate effort to harness and nurture their energy around a common political agenda.

It is therefore not surprising that in a very real sense, women are still locked out of meaningful political participation in Kenya today. While it is clear that not all men are opposed to women’s political empowerment, and that gender responsive policies implemented by political parties to date has brought desirable changes<sup>15</sup>, it is not clear how, when the time to decide on candidates for the 2007 elections arrives, the male-dominated political parties will address the issue of women’s representation. Nor is it clear what strategy women in political parties and in women’s organizations have adopted to ensure that parties honor the potential of women members who have done remarkable work in their wards and constituencies.

Women in Kenya must remember that it is organized and sustained work by women on a collective political agenda which has produced successful results in South Africa, Uganda and Rwanda. In South Africa women played a key role in the national liberation struggle and today are benefiting from a quota system<sup>16</sup> adopted by the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

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<sup>15</sup> The 9th Parliament (2002-2007) which at 18 had the highest number of women parliamentarians since independence in 1963 had 9 nominated members through a policy of affirmative action

<sup>16</sup> -- Constitutional quotas. Some countries, including Burkina Faso and Uganda, have constitutional provisions reserving seats in national parliament for women. -- Election law quotas. Provisions are written into national legislation, as in Sudan.-- Political party quotas. Parties adopt internal rules to include a certain percentage of women as candidates for office. This is the case with the governing parties in South Africa and Mozambique.

I am of the view that many women candidates in Kenya (and here I include myself) do not make it in politics because they do not try hard enough. If we check the three stage milestones critical for success mentioned above we can argue that women consent to fail, and in a number of cases expect to succeed without participating. Let us rally around the familiar call by the then Secretary General for the Beijing Conference in 1995, and now president of the African Union, Her Excellency Gertrude Mongella that ‘there is no going back’. Let us however mobilize around this call to confront the glaring gap between the knowledge and information (the what) on women’s political participation in Kenya and the practical detailed techniques (the how) that we use to support women individually or collectively as a special constituency with tremendous potential to transform Kenya’s political landscape and general development.



## **Chapter Three**

# **The Affirmative Action Debate: Developing Winning Strategies**

By Okiya Omtatah Okoiti

## **Introduction**

Affirmative action is literally the practice of “acting affirmatively” by taking positive, specific steps to overcome discrimination. Affirmative action has its roots in discrimination as a remedy to it, and discrimination has its roots in perceptions that some people are subordinate and/or inferior beings. Hence, affirmative action is based on the principal that discrimination is harmful and not to be desired. Yet, instead of treating everyone equally, it gives an advantage to the people who have been discriminated against historically. And by so doing it appears to offend against the principle of equality itself. Hence, it is controversial.

## **Why Affirmative Action for Kenyan Women**

Traditionally, African women were not allowed to own property, and were under the guardianship (read ownership) of their father, husband, brothers or other male relatives. They were generally viewed as inferior to men. Therefore, they were not suited for public life, and it was generally agreed that the best place for them was in the home. This is still true today.

Some laws have been enacted and education has helped to change this state of affairs. However, the patriarchal propaganda that proclaims male-superiority as self-evident is an ideology that has been cultivated for centuries, is not as easy to change as it is to enact laws against it. Such laws are only the beginning of the long journey to equality for women, and to a truly equal society. It is important that we stay on this road to equality for all, and women’s full participation in politics is the next step on the journey to equality for everyone in Kenya.

Equality is a desirable and ethical end, and affirmative action is the most ethical of means to attain this end. It is not enough to just open the door of opportunity for people who have been shut out. We also need to give them the resources to take advantage of the opportunities given to them. It is not enough to level the playing field and give equal opportunity for everyone. Equality will not be achieved because the disadvantaged will remain disadvantaged, and the advantaged will remain advantaged. The opportunities will be present for the minorities, but they will not have the resources to take advantage of them.

Hence, it is important for those who have the advantage over others to give up some of their power to help create a more equal society. But the powerful are not

willing to relinquish their power, and this is where some of the heat comes from in the debate over affirmative action.

Though affirmative action is reversed discrimination, it is not unjust. To attain the desired end of equality for all, it is not enough to level the playing field and give everyone equal opportunity. It is more ethical to give equal weight to each individual's interests. And it is the job of those who benefited to take affirmative action to give to the disadvantaged in greater measure what they were historically denied.

Women have historically been denied a leadership role or a public voice. So affirmative action is supposed to help get the women's viewpoint listened to. Rich or poor, the male voice has been heard all along. Now, rich or poor, the women's voice needs to be heard. Which types of women are elected to voice the women's viewpoint is a secondary though important concern to this primary issue of their representation in decision making.

### **Brief History of State Sanctioned Affirmative Action**

State sanctioned affirmative action essentially originated in a 1961 executive order issued by US President John F. Kennedy commanding that all federal agencies and those groups doing business with the federal government take "affirmative action" to ensure that they were not discriminating against anyone because of race or skin colour. Contractors were to hire workers "without regard to race, creed, colour, or national origin."

Later, President Lyndon Johnson turned the concept into a preference effort to enable African Americans to enter the mainstream of American life; to "level the playing field." In the words of President Johnson to the graduating class of Howard University, "Freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying, Now, you are free to go where you want, do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a man who for years has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, saying, 'You are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kranz, Rachel. "Affirmative Action." Facts on File, Inc., 2002.

Today, in a democratising world, affirmative action is a tool for women and minorities, not only to “level the playing field” but to achieve “diversity.” This usually involves extensive outreach efforts to include marginalised, isolated, and ignored groups in decision making.

### **Criticisms of Affirmative Action**

This conversion of the rationale for affirmative action is seen as insidious by many opponents. They claim that the injection of “diversity” or “representation” considerations generally reflects willingness to compromise on merit and qualifications. The minimum becomes acceptable rather than the best and the need to foster diversity or representation is quite possibly interminable, so that we will have affirmative action today, tomorrow, and forever. This is unacceptable since from the outset, in the United States, affirmative action was articulated as a temporary measure that was necessary in order to level the playing field for disadvantaged minorities. And they conclude that state-sanctioned discrimination to engineer special interest and gender “representation” in various fields is not a good policy.

Critics also point out that the very modest benefits of affirmative action are usually concentrated on those already more fortunate, with little or no benefits to those who are truly disadvantaged. They argue that only a few of such programs can stand on the basis of their actual empirical consequences. Nor are their moral bases any more solid. Opponents also argue that minorities and women are not seen for their own accomplishments. It is often assumed that their progress is “because of affirmative action,” not because of their own achievements. An assumption develops that minorities and women do not have to work so hard to get it, while others work hard to earn it, so minorities and women are still thought of as inferior.

Regarding political office, some argue that in Kenya there have never been separate salary scales for men and women in the public sector; nor has career advancement been a function of one’s sex. It is therefore preposterous for any group or individuals to present a different picture when it comes to politics. But such observations hardly tell the whole truth. Appointments at top levels in the public service, for example, require political connections. And politics depend on wholly different factors. And while it is true that women as individuals have made progress in securing their rights, the degree of hostility exhibited against them as a group is appalling.

## **The Truth About Affirmative Action**

Many - if not most - people who are for or against the theory of affirmative action. The factual question of what actually happens as a result of affirmative action policies receives remarkably little attention.

The empirical consequences of affirmative action preferences and quotas have been paid remarkably little attention while controversies surrounding these policies have been discussed in terms of the vision and the rationale behind them and the counter-vision and counter-rationales of critics. Vague, emotional, confused, and dishonest words, which are incidental aspects of many controversial issues, are central to discussions of affirmative action around the world.

Lying beneath these conservative criticisms of affirmative action are deeper questions about meaningful social transformation and identity. The implementation of new laws that encourage affirmative action throws up a number of questions about identity. The key question is whether affirmative action leads to an “essentialisation” of categories like women, disabled, HIV-positive, etc. Women are different from each other, and it is impossible to assume anything homogeneous about women. Rich women, poor women, Black women, disabled women, will respond to situations differently.

## **Moving Affirmative Action Forward**

To move our agenda forward, it is important to take the time to understand the nuances of affirmative action so that we can articulate our message in a way people can identify with.

I am a strong believer in the principle that politics and government should be guided by standards originating in the realm of political philosophy and public policy rather than society and private interest.

## **A Case of Preferential Treatment or the Rule of Law?**

Kenya is slowly but irreversibly evolving into a liberal democracy as a result of persistent and sustained citizen-driven clamour for democratic space. By liberal democracy I mean a form of government subject to the rule of law – not a totalitarian law, but one moderated by a constitution that emphasises the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals, and which places constraints

on leaders and on the extent to which the will of the majority can be exercised against the rights of minorities. Among the rights and freedoms conceptually precedent to liberal democratic systems is the right to due representation.

Today, Kenyan women want due representation in all political processes in the country, not as a favour or a token but as a fulfilment of a key requirement of the rule of law, since there can be no true democracy without the full participation of all groups. Therefore, the fight for women's right to equal representation with men in all spheres of decision making cannot and should not be misread as seeking favours. Women's laudable efforts are part of the wider clamour to establish a liberal democratic dispensation in Kenya. Hence, there is no way their actions can be read as seeking favours but striving to establish the rule of law. Everybody must join them and work to complete that which must be done. To demand the removal of obstacles to the rule of law is not to seek favours. It is not preferential treatment; it is rule of law since anything away from equality is anarchy.

If we don't frame women's representation as a question of law and order, all affirmative action efforts in that direction will become decadent and barbaric as they will be seen as promoting favouritism at the expense of meritocracy.

### **What Plagues Women's Participation in Kenyan Politics?**

Because of its all encompassing nature, and the fact that gender biases that frustrate the rule of law are deeply embedded in the fabric of Kenyan life, this race to enable women's full participation in decision making is more like a marathon than a sprint. Affirmative action too should take that into account. But even when running a marathon there comes a time when it is tactically imperative to have a speed surge, so as to keep the prize in sight. Hence, the 2007 elections present the opportunity, and the challenge to sprint and narrow the gap. Some of the ills that have perpetually bedevilled the quest for women's leadership in Kenya include:

- Retrogressive cultural and traditional practices that tend to sideline women, subjecting them to male domination from the cradle to the grave. These range from son preference ideology; lack of beliefs in the importance of educating girls; forced marriages; female genital

mutilation/female circumcision; bride price/dowry collection; widowhood rites and disinheritance of women and girls; negative attitudes towards childlessness; single motherhood; and other gender stereotypes to traditional institutions like Nchuri Ncheke and Kaya Elders, ODM Elders, Narc-K Elders, that are not friendly to women leadership yet they carry a lot of socio-political clout.

- Poor socialisation whereby boys are prepared for leadership while girls are socialised to be domestic workers. So women with low self-esteem don't see themselves as suitable to be leaders.
- Communities see any change of the status quo as an erosion of their cultural values.
- There are communities in Kenya, especially in North Eastern Province, where women cannot vote for candidates of their choice, the decision for whom they will vote for usually rests with the men.
- Lack of political party support and fraudulent party nomination processes tend to disadvantage women more than men. Ownership of dominant parties is male dominated hence the predominant culture is masculine, which puts women at a disadvantage.
- Politically instigated violence: In the current setting democratic elections are rather like submitting to the insolence and dictation of a mob.
- Waging a clandestine but vigorous war against popular freedom, men use the implicit threat of violence that comes with a vocal concern for honour as a weapon to bully women into submission.
- Women politicians confront a "masculine model" of politics where political life is organised for male norms and values and in many cases even for male life-styles. The political culture is specifically masculine, with seemingly no legitimate place for women. E.g. the need to meet and strategise with supporters late at night in bars may not be convenient to many women given the public scrutiny and stigma it exposes them to. Men have no problem with this.
- In many cases women lack and have no access to quality mentoring and hands-on-training before they enter politics. Most of the women will arrive with much of their social climb still ahead of them, and little experience of the anarchy that is Kenyan politics.
- Women's political influence has actually grown recently, but it is exercised largely from outside the formal structures of politics, through reform movements and lobbies.

- The lack of political will where the government has ratified international instruments to promote women in politics, then failed to domesticate them. For example, promoting gender equality and empowering women is one of the requirements of the eight Millennium Development Goals but we have very little to show for it.
- On average women politicians are at a disadvantage in terms of financial resources, since women are a majority of the country's poor and in many communities cannot own property and do not have money of their own.
- Tribalism, a patriarchal construct, clouds issues and distorts the electoral process.
- Media becomes inadvertently biased against women when it fails to embrace gender-neutral language that does not promote barriers against women such as the glorification of conflict, intimidation, negative attitudes, and stereotypes by society and lack of support from the electorate. What good can come of a media that constantly portrays women as consumable sex objects?
- Looking at women from the neck down: When you are a woman, people who want to cut you down fault you by a moral criterion they don't uphold themselves.
- High levels of illiteracy: Democracy cannot function without an informed electorate. An uninformed, or misinformed, public cannot participate in its government; it can only be used by it.
- Lack of adequate preparation: many women candidates hardly prepare well for elections.

### **How Women Elsewhere are Fairing**

Despite being one of the poorest regions in the world, the level of women's representation in parliament in sub-Saharan Africa is higher than in many wealthier countries, according to UNIFEM's *Progress of the World's Women 2002* report. Women's representation in national parliaments across sub-Saharan Africa equals the world average of about 15 per cent. In the US, France and Japan for instance, women hold slightly more than 10 per cent of parliamentary seats.

In contrast, the European Nordic countries have an established history of sizeable women's participation in decision-making, largely because of the egalitarian nature of their societies that take care of their poor (read the weak). Generally,

egalitarian societies, because they are sensitive to the needs of the disadvantaged, tend to be equally sensitive to women's issues.

Another factor is the electoral system in place. By and large, countries where women do well in politics tend to have one form or other of proportional representation, where every cast vote counts. First-past-the-post systems such as ours, where the winner takes all and one vote can decide that winner, hardly allow for true representation. Hence, special interest issues tend to lose out to the quest for raw power.

Most of the countries that have achieved significant increases in women's participation have done so through the use of quotas - a form of affirmative action in favour of women. Worldwide, about 30 of the world's more than 190 countries apply some form of female quotas in politics. Quota systems have allowed more women to be elected into parliaments in Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda.

But women have worked hard to attain these quotas. For example, in Rwanda, which now tops the world rankings of women in national parliaments with 49 per cent of representation compared to a world average of 15.1 per cent, women lobbied heavily, helped to draft the new constitution and developed voting guidelines that guaranteed seats for women candidates. They were also able to push for the creation of a government ministry of women's affairs to promote policies in favour of women's interests.

However, quotas often lack support, with those opposed arguing that: They discriminate against men;

- They degrade merit and amount to tokenism. The implication here is that women lack the qualifications to do the job properly, and that standards are dropped in order to let them in. This argument seldom rethinks what the job entails and what 'qualifications' really mean.
- Some gender activists also argue that quotas may constitute a glass ceiling beyond which women cannot go unless they engage in additional struggle.
- Others contend that women who come into power under such a system may be undervalued or viewed as not politically deserving.

Hence, quotas can only be a transitory solution not a cure.

## **Possible Situation on the Ground in 2007**

We are likely to go to elections without special quotas for women and without substantive reforms to the current constitutional framework where the strong have their way unchallenged.

All indications so far suggest that the political contest in 2007 will be between two major tribal blocks fighting to acquire or retain raw power. Hence, the electioneering will be characterised by waves of tribally charged political invective that will leave no room for other issues to be addressed. Given that tribes are patriarchal institutions owned by men, the resultant masculine political mood prevailing in the main parties will most likely favour the appointment of male candidates over women on the unfounded pretext that men can deliver seats better than women.

If it's hard to hear these relatively non-judgmental words about affirmative action, please don't scream out loud that, "Why, this is the high-priest of patriarchy singing his male chauvinist song!" Just keep in mind that I speak here of my reading of the reality on the ground as it is and I am not stating my philosophical position on gender equality.

Getting many women elected into Parliament is well within the realm of possibility, and no effort should be spared to do just that. But when one attends to the internal dynamics of our political life there are many indications of a political culture in crisis, of a game whose participants no longer know or intend to follow any rules. Issues-based politics will not see the light of day in 2007 because political parties are in crises, having been reduced from platforms for ideology and policy articulation to mere personality cults that serve the whims of power-hungry individuals. Hence, those who perceive meaningful change at the 2007 elections via the current affirmative action efforts are simply hallucinating, and they will encounter surprises on the ground, if not nightmare scenarios.

The main reason for this is that, whereas those promoting women barely (hardly) have the time to draw breath, there is no evidence in activities on the ground to show that those behind the affirmative action efforts are losing any sleep trying to anticipate what could possibly go wrong for women, and preparing adequately for it. Yet it is only by anticipating every possible mode of failure that victory can be guaranteed.

There will be no groundswell of interest in gender equity when it comes to electing representatives. Women's representation will be a non-issue, and those who bank on it are going to be hurt on Election Day. Nobody will roll out a red carpet for women candidates, and nobody will vote for women simply because it is fashionable to do so. Hence, devoid of strategies that address real politics, the 50:50 gender representation concept will remain a non-argument which will amount to nothing more than talking sensibly about the issue but doing nothing about it.

The 50:50 representation campaigns have no overarching message to which the country can be rallied, e.g. fighting corruption or insecurity. If women are cast as fighting for a new Kenyan dispensation, not just for their standing room in the old system then, and only then, maybe will Kenyans listen to their message. This is simply because it does not matter whether the hyena that eats you is female or male. The country is starving and clamouring for a new political dispensation and if the elections are a market where we buy politicians and their policies and ideas, then women should see how their merchandise fits the people's needs. That's why the clamour for a 50:50 gender representation cannot be a simple single-issue campaign of having women in Parliament.

Whereas the 50:50 concept makes for an attractive and compelling argument at the national level, when looking at all the constituencies, on the ground it is totally irrelevant. Each constituency will elect only one MP, which amounts to 100% representation from only one gender. How does one campaign for a 50:50 representation in such circumstances unless we look at the entire country?

Women like men do not exist as a distinct category, but cut across all other social categories. Alongside men they exist as members of many categories. It is only by accepting this fact that we can make headway, by designing advocacy that addresses issues specific to these categories. If we lump them together as women we are likely to end up talking to ourselves.

### **Strategies for Winning at the 2007 Elections**

How many playing fields are there? Who are the players? Even though the law is very clear that garbage in results in garbage out, a number of optimistic assumptions are built into the 50:50 campaign, key among them seems to be that good arguments translate into votes.

## **Levelling the Playing Field or Changing It?**

What do we mean by levelling the playing field? How big is the field? How many fields are there to even? Who are the players? If levelling the playing field means the consolidation of democracy which involves behavioural and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics, then we must begin levelling the playing field by drafting appropriate election laws to shape the political party system. Without consolidated and stable parties, voters cannot be effectively represented, organized or mobilized around issues such as gender; political participation cannot be ideologically structured; and the weak and mercurial parties cannot be expected to fulfil the functions of monitoring and checking on their members who become government leaders, such that pre-election promises are unlikely to be honoured. To the extent that our parties are weak and discredited, the health of our democracy is seriously impaired.

I would like to observe that the fact that women leaders in all fields are accorded as much respect as the men around the country reveals as a mere talking point, the professed belief of patriarchy apologists that the lack of women in power is sustained only by public sentiment. So, to level the playing field in this case, we need to look elsewhere and see whether non-gender determinants may be contributing to the pathetic state of affairs. If we truly wish to turn 2007 into a crucial turning point in the history of Kenyan political culture and gender relations we must be awake to the fact that power is grabbed not given.

Being male is not all it takes to win an election. Men may enjoy certain obvious advantages but victory is never delivered on the silver platter. There are many challenges to running a successful political campaign. Strategies that work for men will work for women. In fact, a woman who enters the arena well prepared is likely to capture the admiration of the electorate faster than equally prepared men because that is not expected of her. Those who turn stereotypes on their head will get admired for it, and that can translate into crucial votes. Women don't have to be better than the men; they just need to be as prepared as the men.

We must treat politics both as a game during which we must outwit opponents and as a serious vocation whose purpose is to serve our constituents. Politics may seem complicated and confusing at times but the game is played on a short list of general rules that should always be followed, and they amount to rallying one's troops. Since the overarching law is that power is grabbed not given, women candidates must be awake to the following:

## **Motivation**

Are the women seeking political office clear about what motivates them? Do they have a real burning desire to be political leaders as an act of self-actualisation or are they in the race for a myriad other reasons, including peer pressure? Are you running because some NGOs have promised to sponsor women candidates and, therefore, there is some money to be made, or are you running because you desire political power so that you can help change society? Have you taken your time to know what it takes? Do you have a legislative agenda so that when you are elected you stay visible and relevant?

## **Preparation**

This has been the biggest handicap for many women at election time. Many don't think of the infrastructure of conducting a successful election campaign. They forget that in the absence of the proper infrastructure you need to conduct a revolution to achieve anything. Given the obvious gender biased barriers a woman faces in the field, one would expect them to be the most prepared for the challenges but they do not. So, how have women candidates prepared to overcome them?

Making ends meet is perhaps the biggest problem that a candidate and her campaign staff have to solve. Do you have the money? What's the money to be used for? How do you mobilise resources and put together an effective campaign team? When do you declare your candidacy? When do you assemble a team? Have you thought through about the party you are running on, given the possibility of block voting due to tribal or regional preferences? If you capture the nomination of a locally popular party, your chances of winning are boosted, and the nomination may be all you need to win the seat. Have you assessed your opponents' strength and weaknesses? What's your entry point? Do you have a tested and proven war plan?

Women must not rush into the arena of public life without adequate preparation, wandering about the political landscape, without a principle or a shilling, pinning their hopes elsewhere, simply because they have been to a gender for a where almost everyone is an activist for women's rights. But the bitter fact is that the fiery activism in boardrooms and similar fora around the country do not find a mirror image on the ground. You will be hallucinating to think that the advance

of women will be like a torrent, sweeping and levelling all before it. On the contrary, it requires aggressive civic education in the constituency where the women are running to break the negative perspectives voters may have against being represented by women.

## **Networking**

Elections are about numbers. Given that in our patriarchal societies men dominate the public sphere, a woman has to do a lot of networking if she wishes to bring people on board her candidacy. How far is your reach? Does your team comprise of opinion makers and local movers able to shore up your candidacy in local eyes, to market you and to bring in votes? Remember that what helps the campaigns a lot is one's corps of volunteers. So do you have volunteers willing to help you without eating into your finances that are required elsewhere?

## **Message**

All politics is local, and all activism is personal. Remember the very important words of Thomas "Tip" O'Neill — a long-time Speaker of the US House of Representatives — who once declared, "All politics is local". Have you crafted a message that resonates with the electorate? Remember your activism is personal. The race for local public office usually does not depend on highly publicised national debates; hence, gender issues will be buried in the rush to get votes. If you go to a village and ask the people what they want, they will list food and schools, hospitals, water, security, and so forth. None will say they want to be represented by a woman! Have you thought this through? If all politics are local, then all local projects are political and must feature in your message. You must offer solutions to problems on the ground. Hence, you don't need an ideology, but good ideas of devolution, principles of social justice, inclusiveness, relevant education and so forth.

## **Style: The personal touch**

The best way to persuade people is the personal way. Hence, the first thing is to demonstrate that you understand where the people are in their lives. What are the basic needs and how do you incorporate them in your agenda? Have you got the stamina to go knocking on doors or meeting folks wherever they may be? Again, what's your war plan?

## Ensure Party Nomination

Parties will only nominate you if they consider you sellable. So invest in the party you are interested in and get well-known to power brokers and to voters well in advance. Missing nomination on the right party may as well mean you have lost it.

## Mapping the Ground

Have you conducted a psephological survey of your constituency to gauge voting patterns and your popularity on the ground? Also, so that you can plan your campaign accordingly, knowing which areas to dedicate your limited resources upon and which ones to avoid is absolutely critical.

## When the Odds are Stacked Against You: Strategy vs. Fate

### Lessons from Africa's Trickster Tradition

In a foreword to one of my plays, *Voice of the People*, Professor Peter Nazareth writes, "Every culture has trickster stories, in which a figure outwits more powerful creatures by using the system of power against itself, playing language and mind games to get past the barriers society has built up in our heads (and what we ourselves have built up). The trickster looks simple or foolish or wears other masks... The power of the Trickster is the way s/he gets past defences, external and internal."

African cultures are replete with "tricksters" who challenge the legitimacy of conventional wisdom and traditional pieties, to achieve change. The trickster is not a moral person in any conventional sense of the word, but he does have an ethic to make society gain from his labours. The trickster expands reality, allowing us to see imaginative potential which conventional wisdom restricts or ignores altogether. A trickster's role is one necessary to all societies which hope to change for the better.

Moralists cannot easily fault the trickster because **he does not personally live a lie, but deals in lies to bring out the bigger truth.** He plays with what is widely accepted without question to be the truth. On the surface of it his public acts are deceitful because his success is based on a lie, but on deeper examination this "lie" serves a larger "truth".

Tricksters are agents of change in society; they perform this necessary social function because they have the imagination to see a possible future and the skill and tenacity to make that vision a reality. They don't let an injustice stay; they destroy it. The trickster's loose way with the "truth" is necessary if he or she is going to help society *rethink* its conventional wisdom in the process of creating new social values.

African culture is replete with trickster stories, in which a figure outwits more powerful creatures by using the system of power against itself, playing language and mind games to get past barriers society has built up.

### **The Race Between The Hare And The Tortoise**

My favourite African trickster tale is the proverbial race between the hare and the tortoise. The tortoise wins the race by placing relatives at strategic points along the route and at the winning post, relatives the hare did not know about, so that however fast the hare runs there is always a tortoise ahead and, most important, the race is already won.

However, to guard against complacency in their camp and to give false hope to those they oppress, colonial powers subverted this tale to have the hare lose the race because of reckless pride, falling asleep during the race, so that it would mean, "Slow and steady wins the race".

This concept is not only impractical but totally unacceptable to the oppressed since it prescribes HARD WORK as opposed to WORKING HARD; since it seeks to justify injustice, to justify the current totally unjust imperial world order that puts the West at the top of the food chain without any care about its social and environmental costs; since it eliminates justice as a key component of (the West's prescription of) morality.

Trickster figures in African folktales engage in trickster strategies to defeat injustice. They are not passive participants in systems that are skewed against them.

Before you wax moral about the deceitful tortoise, ask yourself, what level playing field, what justice, what fairness, what morality even, is there in a race that pits the swift hare against the slow tortoise? The disadvantaged tortoise is

destined to lose the race even before it starts. But if his survival demands that he participate, it is futile for him to simply protest the unfairness, or to take to the tracks in the false hope the hare will fall asleep and let him win by default. He has to reach deeper and develop structures that subvert the hare's unfair superiority. It is his duty to change the rules of the game, to shift the contest to a new arena of struggle.

Because too many of the women's struggles are bogged down in arenas of struggle that cannot deliver the systemic shifts we need, we must move to an arena that will deliver substantive change. But how do we do so with the social change campaign having become a professionalised NGO industry that directs most efforts towards enforcing inadequate regulations, trying to pass watered-down legislation, working to elect mediocre people or to win concessions that don't threaten the status quo?

By demanding we do whatever it takes to get justice, Africa's celebrated trickster tradition invites us to overcome fear and a sense of helplessness to be part of the solution, realise our hidden potential and move to defend our right to self-determination against all odds. The trickster seeks to open our inner eye to know how to win for change.

Since the trickster's ability to adapt to the necessities of change allows him to prevail, those championing our liberation must not waste all their energy just throwing themselves at the patriarchal superstructure on its terms but simultaneously embody alternatives that give them the opportunity to create new political realities.

### **Moral of the Hare / Tortoise Race**

We require winning strategies before we even begin dreaming of numbers. So, who are our relatives? In other words, what will work for us? What do we need to line up at strategic points along the race? Appreciating the task ahead. If you don't do this you are likely not to prepare adequately. Women lobby for political representation is rather weak on the ground. It is mainly an elitist urban-centred movement that leaves a sour feeling that may be people simply wish to be seen doing things to satisfy their principals. There is a strong and urgent need to sensitise women, especially in rural areas, who are the ones who have voted in women MPs over the years, on these:

- Women leaders who have made it should support their own, mentoring and encouraging them to participate in elective politics.
- Police – outreach to the police and get their firm commitment that they will go the extra mile to protect women candidates from the threat of violence given their obvious disadvantage.
- Proper planning from identification of candidate, articulation of local issues, composition of campaign team, to mobilisation of resources.
- Conducting civic education to make voters receptive to the idea of having a woman MP.
- Reach out to the media to be sensitive to women issues.
- Preaching the principle of the lesser evil: let the women (and indeed any voters) whose spouses or breadwinners demand that they vote in a certain way find refuge in the secret ballot. It is a lesser evil to tell a lie and vote according to one's conscience than vote otherwise to please their husbands.
- If thugs deliver votes and the situation on the ground requires their engagement, do all you can to meet your opponents at better terms or they will mess you up.
- Being discreet. When foreign governments fund your entry into an elective office, do you become a voice for pushing their agenda or that of your constituents? Must the hare know about your relatives? How does lobbying distort democracy? Bragging about donor money will cause problems on the ground as voters will want a fair share of that money.
- Carrying out constituency profiles to progressively rank the openings per constituencies, and massively sponsoring candidates in areas we have good chances. For example, it will be futile to field a woman in Othaya to run against the President.
- Pay attention to the qualities of candidates. We should not field candidates with patchy reputations.

The other lesson this hare versus tortoise stuff teaches is that there is no point wasting time on things that are not on the cards. We have to engage the realities on the ground as we meet them. The tortoise did not waste his time demanding that instead of racing the hare the contest should be changed from racing to flogging to establish who among them could take more lashes of the whip. Of course, the tortoise would be at an advantage here given his shell. But that was not on the cards so it did not matter. Our eloquent arguments on equality don't matter if they are irrelevant to the particulars of our situation.

## **Realistic Strategies for Winning 2007**

These strategies are from the point of view of Deliverable constituencies. Sponsors should conduct a proper survey to identify those constituencies where the incumbents are unpopular, and then identify strong women candidates to field in such places. Also identify those constituencies with viable women candidates, not because the incumbent is weak, but because the woman is quality material in her own right. Conduct aggressive civic education bordering on advocacy in these constituencies to among other things make the idea of representation by women acceptable.

**Voter Registration:** Fewer women than men are registered, yet the woman voter is the first line of attack. The Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) has announced another voter registration exercise for the June – July period. Women voters should be mobilised at the grassroots to register in very large numbers around the country.

Threaten power by mobilising a Million Woman March in Nairobi from around the country to come and demand that Parliament creates special constituencies to be contested for, and voted for by women to elect their representatives to the National Assembly whose main mandate will be to prosecute the gender issue. I propose the creation of 46 special seats, being equal to 30% of the current 210 MPs. The ECK would then be assigned to distribute and set the boundaries of the said constituencies.

Patronise women's organisations on the ground long before the male politicians come calling. Women are the only people organised at the grassroots. Sponsorship should be discreet. Failure to keep external support secret will work against affirmative action efforts since they will look like attempts to impose compromised leadership on the concerned community.

There is an urgent need to make grassroots women own affirmative action. This can only be achieved if the effort is transformed into a social movement by moving its organisation from organised women's NGOs/CSOs to the ground. Once women feel that it is their thing, they will support its agenda wholeheartedly. But if they are only called upon to implement what they have not participated in formulating they are likely not to be excited about it.

Weed out corruption in implementing NGOs and CSOs so that the money assigned for affirmative action goes to the effort and not elsewhere.

## **Recommendations on Legal Reforms**

We should not forget that we are running a marathon and that the forthcoming elections are just an opportunity for a speed surge on the way. If many women get elected, well and good; if not, a negative performance should be regarded as merely a speed bump on a long and rough road. We must therefore have a proper post- election strategy to continue the struggle and to build on any gains made at the elections.

All those interested in women issues must follow up with dexterity the constitutional review process to ensure that all gender questions are enshrined in the amended constitution for a more democratised society where all enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

On representation, several recommendations have been floated by various parties on constitutional reforms to enhance the participation of women in elective politics. Among these the most outrageous is that by hecklers of affirmative action that we simply pass a law that automatically nominates a spouse of an elected MP into Parliament. Since a spouse under our laws can only be a person of the opposite sex then, without a doubt, that will give us a very balanced house. Never mind the sideshows that will result given many men will have a problem identifying the beneficiary spouse, and many jilted women will troop to the law courts to file all manner of injunctions against nominees injurious to their private interests. And, what do we do where single people are elected?

On the serious front, the more popular, or rather the one most talked about, is that we increase the number of nominated MPs to a figure that will ensure gender parity. And all manner of numbers have been suggested with elaborate rationales behind each of them advanced by proponents.

Personally, I do not go with this argument. First, because, ideally, the nomination slots exist so that requisite expertise can be brought into Parliament if the elections fail to produce people who can be charged with certain offices such as finance. Never mind that already this principle is abused as parties use the slots to reward loyalists.

Secondly, if the nominating body is the discredited political party then the men will select the women. Your guess is as good as mine regarding which women will be nominated. It will have to be women known to and subservient to these

men, and who can perpetuate the personality cults around the men. But genuine women leaders of the character we need to pursue issues that can change this country will be locked out for obvious reason that they can't play ball.

But affirmative action is not a wave of rotating undeserving characters into office. Candidates should stand out in ways beyond simply being women. The kinds of women who are going to make a difference are the issues-oriented ones who will go to Parliament for a reason and with a reason; with a vision and mission. We need women in touch with reality who can participate in debate on the floor of the house, articulating bread-and-butter issues, and whose expertise will allow them to serve in parliamentary committees.

It will be a breach of privilege if women who are elected on affirmative action efforts forget the interests of the constituency that put them in office. If it is needed they prove anything, it is both their loyalty to affirmative action and the determination to dismantle the institution of patriarchy. Ideally, they should strive to eliminate gender biases while gaining national attention and respect as outspoken advocates of equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, sex, or ethnic background.

Personally I recommend the creation of special geographical constituencies for women so that women can elect their own representatives. This way, the affirmative action efforts can help create a democratic society which is both representative and competitive at the same time.

The main responsibility for electing their leaders should fall on women themselves. Women are their best advocates, and they should be rallied to use their vast numbers, but keeping in mind that they do not live in societies apart. In any society and situation it is those most affected who bring about change. Those who are privileged benefit from a system that marginalises others. It must be up to you, the women.

## **Concluding Remarks**

My defence of affirmative action rests on the assumption that equality is a moral good that should be the central tenet of the Kenyan experience. And we have a duty to challenge patriarchal power relations, and create different kinds of power structures that do not depend on the threat (subtle or not) of violence. I also believe that even though different faces don't necessarily mean different rules, the presence of people from marginalised groups in decision making can make

a qualitative difference in how power is exercised. Women's representation in politics is not just a matter of fairness, it is not just a matter of commonsense; it is a matter of political philosophy. It is a matter of the rule of law that lies at the heart of democracy. The rule of law is the basis of democracy. Hence, affirmative action that is not part of the effort to transform society as a whole for the better, to make it fairer and accountable, is likely to fail dismally.

The roles of women in the current democratic dispensation are enormous and have to be fused to those of men for us to be a complete society. We must never relent in creating awareness on the need for women's political empowerment and participation in the governance of the country. Women must not be limited to the roles of political entertainers as singers and dancers at political rallies, or participants in ill-defined peripheral social committee functions in political parties; rather, they must occupy sensitive positions that allow them to fully participate in decision-making processes.

The current political architecture is built on patriarchal foundations. So, beyond amending the law and because of the many hindrances they face, women should learn the ground rules of competitive politics, create conditions that allow more women to participate and then eventually change the rules to suit the needs of the majority of women. Political parties, the educational system, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, churches - all institutions must take responsibility within their own organisation to systematically promote women's participation, from the bottom up.

So, is affirmative action a way of finding sensible solutions to the issue of women representation in politics or of talking sensibly about the issue? I think we need both to break the gender trap. The rhetoric must get people thinking in a new way. We should avoid language that seems better suited to absurdist comedy than affirmative action debate, and demand that the egalitarianism that rhetorically dominates Kenya's social and political ideology is made to mean something. We must denounce patriarchy and advocate the equality of all human beings. To do this we have to launch an abolitionist assault on patriarchy, taking all we can away from policy-based sources of the problem.

And far from being a blow against the achievements that some women leaders have managed to carve out for themselves, affirmative action should build on these gains and consolidate them as more women are voted into office. That way we break the gender trap and work towards a society in which character not

gender is the measure of one's worth.

Affirmative action is not a slogan for politics; it is a strategy for development. Hence, affirmative action must stop being a bumper sticker and become a plan of action.



## Chapter Four

# **(Re)Configuring Gender-Based Electoral Violence As 'Political Rape'**

By Deborah Okumu

*Men live in fear of the feminine principle with its (imagined) potential to undermine their sense of place in the world” - Heberle Renee*

*“Men’s bodies become weapons and tools of violence and women’s bodies become objects of violence” - Pauline Bart and Patricia O’Brien*

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I take the view that ‘Gender-based Election-related violence’ is a kind of narrative or grammar that can be seen as political rape’. In other words, I am drawing parallels between sexual rape of women and the corresponding ‘political rape’ while noting that violence is a key ingredient that underlines the two.

Kenyan women’s share of parliament stands at only 9 percent, which pales in contrast with Burundi’s 32 percent, Tanzania’s and Uganda’s 30 percent, and Rwanda’s 49 percent (the highest in the world). Recently, parliament threw out a bill seeking to create a paltry 50 special seats for women. And this being an election year, as expected, Kenyan women (estimated at over 150 by August, 2007) have expressed interest in running for parliamentary seats, in part to correct the imbalance aforementioned. However, they are already facing a series of bottlenecks designed to intimidate and terrorize them into withdrawing. The crude subversive tactics range from psychological threats and verbal intimidation, to physical harassment, obstruction and brutal violence.

In this chapter, I note that violence or the threat of it has traditionally been used during electioneering periods to silence aspiring women leaders and women’s activism in general. Such violence seeks to humiliate and degrade women. It has been found to take various shapes such as physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, community and perpetrated or condoned by institutions and lack of laws.

According to one research (“Broken Bodies, Broken Dreams: Violence Against Women Exposed”, United Nations OCHA/IRIN publication), the practice is identified as pandemic and that it transcends the boundaries of geography, race, culture, political leaning and religion.

## **What Is Gender Based Violence?**

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), Gender-Based Violence is defined broadly as the infliction of physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It takes various shapes such as physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family; physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community; and physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. It violates women's human rights since it is a form of discrimination that prevents women from participating fully in society and fulfilling their potential as human beings.

This definition implicitly identifies:

- The perpetrators (subjects) and explicitly points out
- The recipients (objects) of gender-based violence.

This chapter builds on this implicit identification of the source of violence against women and goes ahead to demystify the patriarchal underpinnings of violence against women.

It is important to note that most Kenyan communities still regard women as property. This attitude is largely to blame for the continued exclusion of women from inheriting their parents' or even spouses' property. Voters are, therefore, NOT inclined to confer leadership on people who are 'owned'. As a result, few rural people--including rural women--take local women candidates seriously. It appears that the patriarchal hegemony provides dense institutional supports that socialize men for violence while also obscuring it from public scrutiny.

The question one may ask is: If women are already marginalized (in virtually all spheres of life) by the patriarchal hegemony, why **MUST** this dominant hegemony also tighten the noose around their neck through 'additional' sanctions such as gender-based violence?

## **Examples of Reported Incidences of EGBV**

A chilling incident in 2007 was the assault by hired goons on Ms. Flora Igoki Tera, a Parliamentary Candidate for the North Imenti Constituency in the Meru district of Kenya. She was attacked and tortured by a gang of 5 men near her Meru home. They choked her, scarred her wrists with thorns, beat her with iron bars and dislodged a disc in her spine. Not satisfied, they shaved her hair from her head, mixed it with human faecal matter, stuffed it into her mouth, and forced her to swallow it. All the while, they repeatedly warned her against running for the North Imenti seat in the forthcoming elections. Yet, just before this latest attack, Ms. Tera had suffered another assault perpetrated by unknown assailants who burned her knuckles with cigarettes.

Before the attack on Ms. Tera, another woman aspirant, Ms. Orié Rogo Manduli was a victim of election-related violence in Nairobi which also left her hospitalised with serious injuries. Male politicians have also fallen victim to the spiraling spectre of violence. MPs William Ruto and Omingo Magara accompanied by other parliamentary aspirants were brutally beaten up by a hired gang at a political rally in South Mugirango. What baffled observers was the apparent complicity of the security apparatus, even as the suspected ‘paymaster’ (a senior cabinet minister) celebrated the violence in full view of the cameras.

According to Professor Jacqueline Oduol, an aspirant for the Alego Usonga parliamentary seat, much of the violence that women candidates endure is psychological. She reveals that “When a woman declares an interest in political leadership, she must often endure violence and name-calling, often in the presence of her husband, son or brother, all intended to embarrass these relatives. The first thing is to make her look ridiculous and trivial. She is just a woman who would be better invisible. She is girded with shame and guilt. People wonder who will be taking care of her husband and children while she is attending to her political roles. They try to make her appear insensitive to her family’s needs; never mind her qualities and capacities.”

Other psychological and verbal intimidations against women have taken the same line as the following statements collected by the African Women and Child Features (AWC) during the 2002 general elections indicate:

- A woman could become pregnant while in parliament and spend

- much of her time nursing the baby (Nithi).
- Women are unfit for leadership and better suited for domestic chores (Emuhaya).
  - A woman could easily divorce her husband and cease to be part of the community that elected her (Tigania East).
  - Women cannot pretend to be men and should restrict themselves to domestic affairs (Kangundo).
  - The case of Mumina Jilo Konso, an aspirant for Isiolo South parliamentary seat reveals attempts by her Borana clan to persuade her to step down in favour of her male in-law.
  - In the run up to the 2002 elections, a man in Belgut constituency chopped off the ear of his wife following a drinking spree in which he had used the entire Kshs. 100/- given to her by a parliamentary candidate.
  - Around the same time, hirelings beat up Yvonne Khamati, an aspirant for the Makadara parliamentary seat.
  - Similarly, Lydia Kimani was attacked in Manyatta constituency while Professor Wangari Mathaai was forced to leave her own campaign rally by violent supporters of her rival.
  - Likewise, Ms. Philgona Okundi was undressed in Rongo and seriously whipped by supporters of her main opponent.
  - The same violent streak that befell Ms. Betty Njeri Tett in Westlands constituency, also happened to Orié Rogo Manduli in the 2004 by-election in Kisumu.

These are not by any way the only incidents of election-related violence we have seen in the immediate past, nor are we positive that they will be last.

### **Imagining Gender-Based Electoral Violence as ‘Rape’**

Renee Heberle, writing in the journal *Women and Violence*, observes that masculine dominance (over women) is essentially fragile, but this truth has been carefully obscured. Renee contends that the exposure of women to suffering may be a political strategy of obscuring male insecurity. Pain inflicted through violence is reinvested as patriarchal capital to prop its dominance. Patriarchy’s shifting terms of existence indicate that it is never fully successful in its project of dominance. It is constantly reinventing itself and reconstituting the terms of its legitimacy in the face of threats from women, which is why sexual violence is

part of the paraphernalia deployed in this process. To clarify this analysis, Renee borrows from Elaine Scarry's analysis of rape and torture. Scarry views sexual violence against women as a 'necessary tool' deployed by men in the name of stabilizing the otherwise fragile edifice of masculinist power. While explaining 'political rape', Scarry draws analogy to the use of torture by illegitimate regimes to destroy the world of those they hold in prison. Torture (pain) is a tool for re-creating the world of the despotic state in the mind of the prisoners. In a sense, this process converts absolute pain into the fiction of absolute power. The physical (illegitimate) pain is so real that it seems to impose a certain quality of 'legitimacy' on the power that wields it. But in the final analysis, the reality remains that such illegitimate power is so highly contestable that the unstable regime has to use torture.

Renee continues to hold the view that the politics embedded in inflicting pain and the representation of the truth of pain, resonates profoundly with women's efforts to describe the experience of sexual violence. She argues that much is invested by patriarchy in sustaining the 'reality' of sexual violence and constituting its devastating effects on women's bodies.

By visualizing women's bodies as first and foremost **desirable**, secondly as **impenetrable** and therefore, **requiring 'conquest'**, the logic of sexual violence (rape) appears to encourage men to subdue women. Renee notes that sexual violence is the means by which men can control the sexual "otherness" and what they perceive as the potentially threatening power of women. Men live in fear of the feminine principle with its imagined potential to undermine their sense of place in the world. So, sexual violence becomes handy as a tool to counter the potency of the feminine.

In this chapter, I take the view that the 'Gender-based Election-related violence' is a kind of narrative or grammar that can as well be read as 'political rape'. In other words, I am drawing parallels between sexual rape of women and the corresponding 'political rape' while noting that violence is a key ingredient that underlines the two. We have already seen how Renee and Scarry analyse the patriarchal construct of power based on rape.

Using this framework, the gender-based election violence we have experienced perennially in successive election years, appears to share certain similarities with 'rape'. If men are strong, knowledgeable and powerful on the political

front, why MUST they stoop so low as to invest their energies in violence to keep women from leadership? It boils down to what Scarry noted in relation to rape: that patriarchal power is fragile and it resorts to violence to guard itself against threats. Nancy Berns describes this prevalent practice as '*patriarchal resistance*'.

Another important point that emerges in this analysis is the concept of legitimacy. Both Renee and Scarry are agreed that despotic (illegitimate) regimes use pain as a tool to legitimize their power. In our case, we may as well see masculinity in similar terms – as illegitimate. And like illegitimate regimes, masculinity will not spare anything, including violence, to inscribe its dominance. So, this is the sense in which gender-based electoral violence assumes the dubious distinction of seeking to legitimize 'illegitimate' patriarchal dominance over women

### **State Complicity or Criminal Impunity?**

While reacting to the attack on Ms. Tera mentioned earlier in the chapter, Civil Society Organizations under the umbrella of the Human Rights Network, observed that the government appeared reluctant to curb gender-based electoral violence and less inclined to speed up investigations leading up to the arrest of the perpetrators. To date, no single suspect has been arrested and arraigned in court in connection with the outlined incidents. But what baffles observers is the utter failure of the police to bring to book a cabinet minister who openly ordered his militia to attack opposition legislators. And despite the faces of the militia appearing clearly on television, the security machinery has shown a disturbing unwillingness to bring them to book.

The provincial administrators who preside over the security machinery at the grassroots have been singled out to have a history of siding with incumbents, despite the fact that they hold the key to peaceful and lawful elections. Joining the long list of those who have expressed concern over this 'vicious cycle' of gender-based electoral violence was Amnesty International. This international human rights body reminded the government that it has an obligation to respect international law and other obligations that establish human rights standards. It lamented that the government has failed on this score. Finally, it urged the Kenyan Government to make women's rights a priority by endorsing gender-sensitive policies and attitudes, while also working towards overhauling all practices that underpin impunity.

In the light of the foregoing, I may agree with Renee that, “state-centered, bureaucratic and legalistic strategies usually do more to normalize violence as a constitutive aspect of political life than to prevent it”.

To ‘normalize’ such violence, the patriarchal hegemony turns to the prevailing knowledge reservoirs. In the words of Michel Foucault, the power to control knowledge allows one to control the dominant discourse on issues, thus silencing alternative perspectives. In other words, discourse on gender-based electoral violence is still dominated by the ‘patriarchal-resistance’ perspective, which incidentally, also controls state power. The implications for this sad situation are grave for women.

And since women do not control the dominant discourse, their pain has increasingly failed to get the requisite attention. This is to say that owing to the discordant effect of ‘patriarchal resistance discourse’, the pain of gender-based electoral violence appears to resist representation while actively working to destroy itself. In other words, women’s own voice on the pain of gender-based electoral violence exists in a destructive tension with women’s own ability to communicate it. And this is quite significant for patriarchal politics.

Is it possible that the voice of women on gender-based electoral violence is circumscribed in limiting boundaries set by the dominant ‘resistance discourse’? This is the question that Renee is grappling with when she observes that: “Like prisoners of a despotic regime, the outside world accepts the power of the torturer as ‘having succeeded in making the prisoner to speak,’ thus further destroying the world of the prisoner and enlarging the territory of the despotic state. Power is cautious. It covers itself. It bases itself in another’s pain”.

### **Do We Have a Problem With Existing Mechanisms of Curbing This Violence?**

It is disheartening that strident public condemnation, numerous half hearted legal efforts, and widespread discussion of the subject have not helped to curb gender-based electoral violence. Instead reports of such violence have steadily peaked around election time.

Here again we quote Renee who argues that existing strategies appear to be ‘telling our society something it already knows’. She questions the strategy of

‘speaking out’ on gender-based violence to a society that is yet to be persuaded about its ‘reality’. In other words, new strategies need to be adopted because society is ‘deaf’.

Another weakness identified by Renee is the false conviction among feminists that the existing social and political institutions (which continue to represent public patriarchy) will be helpful. She decries the fact that women have over the years increasingly and frequently turned to the “legitimate” violence and paternalistic protection of the state. They turn to the courts for punitive justice against batterers and to the social service industry for physical and psychic sustenance. But feminism knows that these institutions are the representative sites of patriarchal rule.

Renee is pessimistic that turning to these institutions offers increased legitimacy to the violence of the state in general and to patriarchal norms in particular. At another level, it has been observed that there is an inherent risk in enlarging the map of women suffering from gender-based electoral violence since this exposure works in reverse as a social insignia of male power.

A related but rather controversial argument postulated by Wendy McElroy appears to blame ‘feminists’ of using violence against women to create a ‘new jurisprudence’ that assesses guilt and imposes punishment based on gender. McElroy claims that “men’s rights are being violated in this fight against gender-based violence. This sort of injustice is the inevitable consequence of treating men as a separate and antagonistic class, rather than as individuals who share the same humanity as women. Men are not monsters. They are our fathers, brothers, sons, husbands, and lovers”.

### **What Options Do We Have?**

I should start by saying that what I am putting forward are just some of the solutions to the growing problem of gender-based electoral violence.

- The ongoing campaigns by Civil Society organizations against gender-based violence should be supported. These include the effort by the Institute for Education in Democracy in conjunction with about 30 other local groups, who promote ballot secrecy in marginalized districts where men frequently

- demand their wives' voting cards and cast ballots on their behalf.
- Training of election monitors and observers, conducting of voter education and following up with activist research to produce advocacy tools, may be another strategy available for civil society and other players.
  - Supporting more women aspirants to vie in many constituencies in order to demystify the archaic 'cultural' attitudes about women's leadership.
  - Encouraging the participation of women in policy agencies such as commissions or women's bureaus and women's movements, which in combination, give women a stronger voice in the policy-making process than the mere presence of women in the legislature.
  - Increasing agitation for constitutional and legislative reform to widen space and guarantees (safeguards) for women's rights.
  - Constant monitoring and reporting on the government's compliance with its obligations to international human rights covenants, protocols and declarations.
  - Working with the mass media to expose the reality of gender-based violence through the narration of women's experiences in the public sphere in 'speak outs'. This should include the initiative to expose sexual violence as the signifier of the impotence of masculinist social power rather than as the "reality of masculinist social power.
  - Exploring and establishing joint partnerships with the government (though patriarchal) with a view to enriching its perspectives and insights on the problem.
  - Encouraging the judiciary to put measures in place that would mete out effective punishment on culprits.
  - Assisting victims of gender-based electoral violence to overcome trauma, injury and material losses.
  - Working with the Electoral Commission and political parties with a view to encouraging them to sign up to and respect a non-violent electoral code of conduct.
  - Encouraging the law enforcement agencies to live up to public expectations: impartiality, fairness to all, and zero tolerance to any threats to peace.
  - Community mobilization for change through efforts such as local activism, working with elders over a long period of time, encouraging community ownership of the process (Michau, 107).

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## Chapter Five

# **Strategy for Raising the Profile of and Leveraging Women and Young Candidates for the 2007 General Elections**

by Kepta Ombati

## Introduction

A Women and Youth Alliance (WAYA) is a concept that stands for principled and value-driven political leadership, and it focuses on women and young candidates with these qualities. It recognizes that failure to put a high premium on principle and values could easily lead to more of the same old, bad leadership, and hence no transformation in spite of improved representation of women and young people in parliament and other decision-making arenas.

There is no carbon copy of this idea. However, the closest example of positive and substantive outcomes from co-operation between women and youth is perhaps within the Africa National Congress (ANC), the dominant party in South Africa. Two examples illustrate the symbiotic relationship. First, by the late 1940s, the ANC Women's League had started building its political gravitas, *motivated by Congress of Youth League (CYL)* which had succeeded in turning the ANC into a more radical direction. In fact the ANC Women's League was revitalized by Ida Mtwana, a Youth Leaguer, a moving spirit amongst women - an orator and heckler stepping in to take over the leadership of the Women League in 1948<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, in more recent times, *with the support of the ANC Women's League*, the ANC Youth League has guaranteed representation and voting rights at the conference, and was recently elevated to the status of a province in the ANC constitution. This means the youth league could have a much higher number of delegates than the 50 that is traditionally sent to the conference<sup>19</sup>. This example of intra-party co-operation in leveraging for power, influence and participation can be replicated at the national elections with good leadership, organization and funding.

This chapter presents a strategy for improving the performance of women and youth candidates in national elections. The immediate target is the 2007 general elections but the strategy seeks to leverage the participation of these two constituencies over a longer time. WAYA is essentially a concept, strategy and an ongoing effort of women and youth enthusiasts, to get women and young people representation in elective positions in Kenya. It is an idea whose time has come for two reasons; first, women and young people have the numerical strength to change the face of our political make-up. This strength has remained unutilized. Secondly, the country is in a state of transition and ripe for fundamental change

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<sup>18</sup> Malibongwe Igama Lamakhosikazi, ANC Women's League: 50 Years of struggle

<sup>19</sup>Mail and Guardian, October 8, 2007

– which must include the change of the character of our leadership.

It is time that women stopped dancing to male candidates and became candidates themselves, and that youth should stop being a source of cheap labour for unscrupulous politicians. It is based on the belief that time for complaining is over; now is time for action.

## **Historical and Contextual Analysis**

Though Kenya is an emerging democracy, the country's democratic development has been slow and unsteady. Democratic institutions remain weak. Consequently the fruits of freedom, democratic elections and development have not benefited women and young people in the country. Fifteen years after the re-introduction of multiparty democracy, for instance, the best representation of women in Parliament is in the current 9th Parliament which has only 18, half of them elected and the other half nominated, out of 222 members of Parliament. The bigger picture is worse as illustrated by the following statistics.

### **Comparative Analysis of Women Representation and Participation in Kenya's Parliament: 1963 – 2007**

	Parliament	Time / Duration	Total No. of Women MPs	No. of Elected Women MPs	No. of Women vs. No. of Men Nominated to Parliament	
					Women	Men
1.	1st Parliament	1963 – 1969	0	0	0	2
2.	2nd Parliament	1969 – 1974	2	1	1	10
3.	3rd Parliament	1974 – 1979	6	4	2	14
4.	4th Parliament	1979 – 1983	5	4	1	11
5.	5th Parliament	1983 – 1988	3	2	1	9
6.	6th Parliament	1988 – 1992	2	2	0	10
7.	7th Parliament	1992 – 1997	7	6	1	12
8.	8th Parliament	1997 – 2002	9	4	5	9
9.	9th Parliament	2002 – 2007	18	10	8	4

Statistics indicate that whereas we begin with a significantly large number of women contestants, most drop out as a result of violence and harassment or as a result of unfavourable party structures and processes that promote a model of politics that is heavily masculine. This is worsened by lack of political will which is evidenced in failure or reluctance to domesticate and implement international

covenants that would open up space for women's participation. Financial resources are also a great hindrance for most young and women candidates. Yet studies in developing countries have concluded that men and women do have different opinions on political issues generally, and on the qualification for public office, largely the result of disparities in economic dispositions (Rezentii and Curran 1992:252)<sup>20</sup>

Though similar historical comparative analysis for youth representation in parliament does not exist, there are other useful indicators on the poor representation of the constituency in parliament. In the 9th Parliament, for instance, MPs under the age of 45 constitute less than 20% while Kenyans in this age bracket consists of 89.4% of the population.

The above asymmetrical relationship is mapped out in government prioritization and allocation of resources for development. Legislations also quite naturally have followed the biases of the men in power. It is for this reason that development in the country remains unbalanced and impervious to the millions of the excluded majority wallowing in poverty and human wastage.

### **Why is Change in Character of Our Leadership Necessary?**

To begin with, it is unacceptable in a democracy in which women constitute over 52%, and young people over 89.4% of the population, that issues of the two constituencies should be ignored in public policy and development processes. Whereas women and young people bear the brunt of the bad policies or of good policies badly implemented by state and non-state actors, they have little say on these policies.

Secondly, it is wrong to continue treating women and young people as part of the problem in this country rather than see them as part of the solution. There is ample evidence to show that women and young peoples' resourcefulness is more often than not constrained by bad leadership. Moreover even though women and young people form a significant source of government revenue they are not only grossly under-represented but generally excluded from important decision-making functions and processes of government.

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<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Bruce G. Miller, *Women and Tribal Politics: Is There a Gender Gap in Indian Elections?* Published in *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1994), pp. 25-41

Thirdly, women and young people representing the connection between the present and the future of the nation require tutelage and support in leadership if the vicious cycle of poor leadership, bad governance and under-development is to be broken and mistakes of the past avoided. Needless to state, the level of preparation of our next generation of leaders will greatly determine the direction and speed of the country's growth.

Fourthly, Kenya is a nation in search of its identity. The identity crisis manifests itself in many different ways. However the most evident sign of this identity crisis is demonstrated in the crisis of the two publics – the national and the ethnic – that is evident even amongst the country's elite. Though young people, for instance, are increasingly more cosmopolitan and outward looking, there is evidence that the dilemma of the two publics and ethnic capture continue to present a serious challenge to many in crunch moments.

Studies show that the country's poverty gap has been widening and worsening. More and more Kenyans are getting poorer. There is evidence that this development is neither entirely innocent nor accidental. It is as a result of "rigged development"<sup>21</sup>. The many consequences of inequalities are mostly felt by the women and youth and other vulnerable and marginalized social categories.

Cognisant of the above facts, constituent members of WAYA have developed comprehensive theoretical bases for the reconstruction of the country which exist in various manifestos and position papers. This initiative aims at consolidating these visions into a single inclusive platform for transformative change; consolidating a core of champions around this vision and providing the country with a clear alternative of political leadership founded on the philosophy of leadership for service. With essentials of the vision for a new Kenya in place, what is required are committed champions to consolidate the vision and drive it. It also aims at turning women and youth from 'stake less' individuals to committed drivers of transformative change in this country. Indeed this is the only security for all because large constituencies of disinherited and excluded people are the greatest danger to the nation's stability, harmony and continued existence as a going concern.

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<sup>21</sup>See Dan Okello and Kwame Owino, *Socio-Economic Context of Governance in Kenya* in A. Bujra (ed), *Democratic Transition In Kenya: The Struggle From Liberal To Social Democracy*, 2005.

Consequently, this initiative shall provide the critical missing link between the good intentions expressed in many party manifestos, and the poor records of implementation. It shall provide the champions who will convert good intentions, public pronouncements and political statements that have been penned into tangible results for women and young people; and through this, for the entire nation. Greater participation of women and young people in leadership will further democratize leadership. However, more important is the fact that it will supply new ideas, perspectives and approaches to dealing with the many problems that face our developing nation. It will be a big step towards unlocking the unexploited potential of the people who have been suppressed and excluded from decision-making process for most of the last four and half decades of independence. It will also instil a sense of pride for women and youth and provide new energy for fighting against corruption and other governance and social vices that continue pinning down our nation's progress in development.

### **Viability of the Initiative**

This initiative is viable for three reasons. First, it is driven by organizations i.e. Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness (CREAW) and Youth Agenda (YAA), that have built a strong and credible presence amongst the three constituencies that will be critical for the success of the campaign namely, women, the youth and the media. The organizations bring into this campaign expertise, political will and nationwide networks as well as complimentary competences and constituencies.

The second reason is that the two voting blocs – women and youth – constitute majorities not only among the populace but indeed within the electorate. Of the 14 million registered voters, over 60% are voters under the age of 40 years. And of these voters, 46% are women. More importantly, historically of all the voters who turn up at the polling stations to vote, the majorities are women and this is unlikely to change in the near future. The problem therefore is not numbers but rather poor internal organization and positioning rendering this critical comparative advantage vacuous in elections. This campaign seeks to correct this problem by raising the awareness of the two constituencies on the overwhelming powers they possess to change the structure and texture of our political leadership; to improve the profiles of women and youth candidates by highlighting their strengths and by mobilizing women and youth behind a common banner.

Thirdly, this campaign will interface with existing programmes focusing on promoting women and youth candidates. The partner organizations are also implementing partners in the gender and governance programmes, whose overall goal is to ensure equal participation of women and men in leadership under the banner of 50:50. The youth agenda on the other hand, is the leading organization in the country in youth leadership development and advocacy.

### **How will the Initiative Run?**

This initiative is an innovative fast track effort to even out the electoral ground for women and young candidates, and they will not be integrated but mainstreamed from the onset. It will consist of a nationwide media campaign promoting the candidacy of women and young people over a period of six months, which will result in a sensitized and strong national coalition that supports women and young people seeking to contest for political office.

The overarching aim of the initiative is to significantly increase the representation of the two majoritarian but marginalized and excluded constituencies of women and the youth in key decision making arena's beginning with this year's general election. It also aims at sharpening the articulation of the agenda of the two groups, as well as extracting accountability from both government and political parties over the practices, which have led to the entrenchment of the marginalization and exclusion of women and youth. The initiative also seeks to achieve five other important outcomes namely: definition of common electoral agenda; reduction of tensions, competition and conflicts; leverage the numbers; compliment competences and re-writing the rules of the political game.

Due to the nature of the initiative as a nation-wide media campaign, it will establish and work through a broad based network, partnerships and alliances that will continue to propagate the agenda. The benefits of new transformative leadership as a strategy for dealing with our country's governance and development challenges will be felt nationally.

### **Activities Driving the Campaign**

To achieve the objectives of this initiative and realize the anticipated outcomes, the campaign has lined up activities which include undertaking sustained and intense media publicity campaign through electronic and print media; hold shows

in all major national and local radio and TV stations; and organize interviews for candidates and supporters with various media outlets.

## **Outputs**

These activities should lead to the following outputs:-

- Media that is sensitive and supportive to women and young candidates.
- Increased visibility of women and young candidates contesting for political office and pushing for transformative change.
- Increased synergy and a more enhanced and co-ordinated effort among women and young people around the elections.
- Better understanding on the need to have a democratic government as a vehicle for enhancing women and young peoples' space in decision making.

## **Who Will be Involved?**

The success of this initiative will heavily rely on the agency but also on the support base. The campaign will be built around Women and youth candidates but will cultivate support among urban voters, rural voters, the Media, Civil society, Political parties, Development partners, Interest groups as well as Experts in related or relevant fields.

## **Success Indicators**

The initiative will be considered a success if the visibility of women and young people in politics is raised significantly. There should also be increased synergy and a more enhanced and co-ordinated effort among women and young people interested in political office. Increased number of registered voters in the country; a media empowered to support women and youths; increase in the number of women and youths in key decision making positions in our political topography; and the number of established broad based networks, partnerships and alliances with strategic groups for political mileage are the other key success indicators.

## **Risks**

This initiative faces certain critical risks. Key among these are the political dynamics which include the capricious nature of the work-in-progress; multiparty

politics; tribal divisions; and the constantly changing political loyalties and alliances. Rising insecurity, the possibility of an early or snap general elections, and scepticism are also significant threats to the success of the initiative.

## **Conclusion**

First, while the odds are great, given the cultural, structural and financial barriers which exist against this initiative, it can be done. Our history is replete with movements that have succeeded in pushing ideas that have become turning points in our political history. The only pre-condition is that the idea must be indeed rooted in real grievance and that it must have strong, committed champions to succeed. This is what motivated the success of the independence struggle in which resource-poor struggle movements such as the Mau Mau played a pivotal role in securing success in the 1950s. It is also what drove the pro-democracy, Forum for the Restoration of Democracy in the early 1990s leading to the repeal of section 2a, which ensured the return of multi-party democracy in Kenya. Similarly the constitutional reform movement spearheaded by the National Convention Assembly and the National Convention Executive Council in the late 1990s was driven by the same factors.

Secondly, whereas the goal of the initiative is to benefit women and youth candidates running in the 2007 general election, its full force is likely to be realized over the next five years. However the seed must be planted now and cultivated vigorously.

Thirdly, though CREAM, AMWIK and YAA may be the initiators of WAYA, its success will largely depend on their readiness and ability to free the campaign to gain its own life. They however must provide adequate incubation and nurturing for the idea. This is precisely because its enormous potential also makes it very vulnerable to attacks by those who stand to lose in the shift of balance of power in status quo. The idea could also be scavenged and bastardized if picked by people or initiatives that are opportunistic and not convicted.

Fourthly, there is the challenge of driving an initiative that is multi-party and cross-party in an environment in which partisan politics has developed deep-running fault lines. However, for it to succeed it must be cross-partisan and open to all who support the need to restructure the country's leadership so as to ensure inter-generational equity and gender justice.

Finally, it must be emphasised that while WAYA is a very powerful initiative for political negotiation and leverage, its success relies greatly on women and young people believing in their ability to supplant the status quo and putting their numbers behind this belief. Women and youth are superficial minorities. In reality they are excluded majorities and it cannot be if but when they will make the numbers count for them. But even more importantly is that the country needs the supply of a new vision, new value system and new perspectives and depth in responding to the many challenges that face our country as a developing nation and new champions to drive the vision. These champions that will overhaul the existing dispensation – characterized by limited democracy, ethnicity, massive economic inequalities and pervasive social injustice – cannot come from the ruling gerontocracy. The champions and leaders that will drive the vision and move the nation to its next level of development must come from women and the young as well as other minorities which have fared worst from the status quo.

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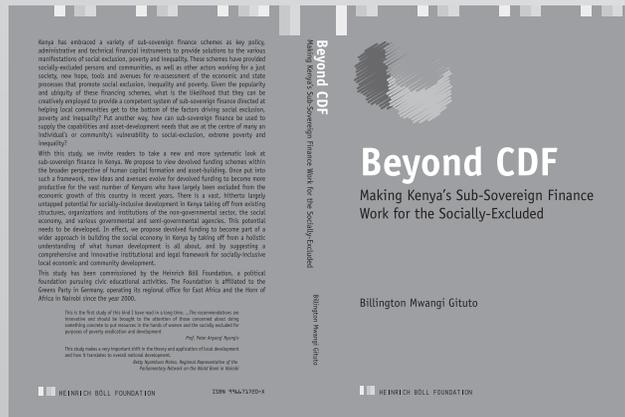
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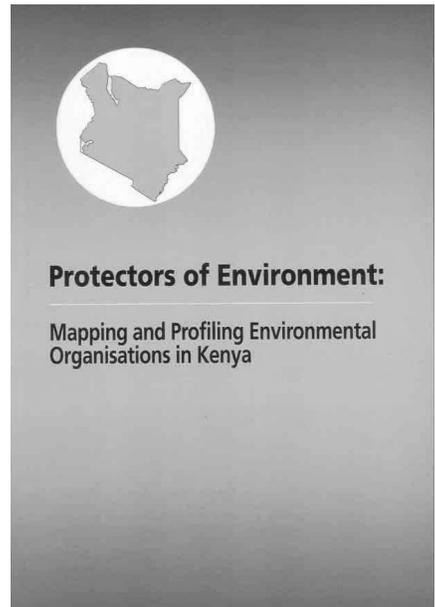
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