Transforming Leadership, Changing lives

The value women bring to leadership and governance
Laboso proves that women are up to the task

BY JAMES KIPROTICH

For Dr Joyce Cherono Laboso, being a politician was one of the least things that crossed her mind. She was at home with her profession. But one day, the death of her sister changed everything.

She says: “Sometimes things will happen to make you discover a new passion. And though it might come late in life, it can propel you to new heights of satisfaction and help you impact positively on fellow citizens.”

Laboso, 55, says she discovered her passion after the death of her big sister, Lornah Laboso, through a plane accident in 2008.

As she mourned her sister, the now the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, says the elders had other ideas. They saw her as the perfect replacement for Lornah who was credited for inspiring change in Sotik constituency.

In her community, it is not easy to say no to elders. One has to go by their decision and their blessings carry a lot of weight.

“I knew my sister’s shoes were too big to be filled, but I agreed to the elders’ counsel,” she recalls.

In the ensuing by-election later that year, she registered a major feat. Not only did she emerge number one, but she also defeated a former army brigadier.
who enjoyed the support of the President, Daniel Arap Moi.

This, according to the deputy speaker, was a testimony that women power was indeed at its peak.

She says, “I was just plucked from the lecture room at university to face a male-dominated political terrain. My sister had achieved her best but I was not quite sure if I was equal to the task. At the polls, I garnered a comfortable margin against the army boss.”

That victory set on path for better tidings in politics and she has not looked back.

As soon as she joined Parliament, she regularly featured in the list of the legislators who acted as temporary speakers. She had marked her territory and proved that she had what it takes for high profile positions.

“I decided to use this as a learning point in my political career. First, I earned the trust of legislators from the different political divide. Two, I realized that this rare opportunity was a stepping stone to new heights in Parliament and life. We should all learn to appreciate the different positions we hold. You learn a lot and prepare yourself for new offices.”

Come the next elections in 2013, Laboso easily sailed through and was subsequently elected as the Deputy Speaker. Her work at the last Parliament had prepared her for this position, ranking her as the woman with the highest position in Parliament. The Senate’s speaker and deputy are both men.

Since 2008 when she joined the political landscape, Laboso has made many gains. She says she has encouraged equal representation for women in her constituency and the country.

“Every woman legislator who has faced a male competitor knows what it means to fight and win. You are faced with all odds on the way. I have ensured that the voice of the woman is adequately heard,” she says.

Her late sister was the first to defeat male politicians in the area and she has continued that winning streak.

Inspire women

“This victory helped to inspire women that it was all possible. Other women who later came in followed the example we had shown. Raising the bar in regard to achieving what people want, especially women, is a major boost.”

One of her achievements is promoting sustainable peace along the Bomet-Nyamira border. For long time, the area was known for armed conflict triggered by cattle rustling and competition over resources.

“In any armed conflict setup, women and girls are the most affected. For years, we had seen uncalled for bloodshed between the two communities. One of my vows as I joined politics was to ensure that the two communities live in lasting peace,” she says.

Her dream has come true and the two communities enjoy peace with business thriving along their borders.

Laboso is also credited for the construction of the Sotik-Borabu road which connects the two communities. The road has greatly encouraged and improved economic activities in the area.

“In most cases, the easiest way to silence inter-community wrangles is to have an enabling infrastructure. That is how people connect their ways and become one.”

As she savours her success locally, her star is also shining at the international arena. She is currently the chair, African, Caribbean and Pacific states, European Union Parliamentary Assembly, which is abbreviated as ACP-EU Assembly.

Last year, Citihope, an international women focus organization, singled her out as one of the three top women who were creating impact in society.

But not all is easy sailing. As a speaker in Kenya’s biggest and diverse Parliament since independence, Laboso does not have it easy all the time.

For example, early this year legislators splashed water on her during a heated parliamentary discussion. It was a tough moment but it did not dampen her spirit.

“Such moments give you an opportunity to stand your ground. It hardens your resolve to stand up to be counted.”

Her positions at the August House have been preparing her for a bigger office. She feels she is ready for an even bigger role come 2017. She is going for the Bomet County gubernatorial position.

“First, I want to challenge the notion that only male politicians can be county governors. Women are not there to fill the gaps as mere running mates. We should all run for the top job. We do not only have the numbers but also the strength to go for it and achieve the potential of our counties,” says the mother of three.

She adds: “This is the time for us (women) to believe in our power. Let us all put in the faith in a possible tomorrow.”
Growing up in Kwale and Mombasa counties, Dr Agnes Zani had first-hand account of what girls face in their formative years.

She recalls how many girls, even those with the potential of excelling in their studies, were plucked from class and married off by the poor parents who wanted the little bride price that was offered by men many times older than their daughters.

“It was unfortunate. It still is as it is common in the coastal region. The economically challenged parents were happy to get daughters whom they saw as a source of income in terms of bride price,” says Zani.

This childhood experience has
continued to shape her approaches to life. In her university days, she did assignments and wrote papers based on this issue of poverty and early marriages.

Clearly, her work was cut out very early in her life. As she went through school up to attaining a Doctorate degree, Dr Zani knew that her mission was to champion the cause of such girls and help them realize their dreams.

“Through various fronts and activism movements, I was doing something for the girls in Kwale. The Orange Democratic Movement nomination in 2013 gave me the platform to help the girls,” says the former sociology lecturer at the University of Nairobi.

As Senator, she says one “of my urgent duties was to make sure such girls remained in school and finished their education. This is the only way to tackle poverty, since the benefits of education are enormous.”

Dr Zani says she will not rest until girls get to study. She will fight for equal opportunities both at the family and national levels until she wins the battle.

“The fact that I was a lecturer at the University of Nairobi, a leading centre of excellence, shows that giving girls an opportunity to study opens doors and opportunities,” says the senator.

Her father, Zachariah Zani and mother Teresa Zani were distinguished educationists in the country and Kiswahili authors whose books made it to the national curriculum for decades. They played a greater role to who she is now. And she believes parents are key to girls’ empowerment.

One of the strategies she has pushing for to address access to education by marginalized communities and groups, especially girls, is the establishment of a university in each county.

She believes this is the quickest way to address the regional inequities which have taken root in the country for far too long.

“Some regions lag behind because centres of learning were located far thus limiting their access to education. For instance, Kwale did not have a university. Kwale represents many regions in the country which did not boast of such institutions of higher learning. It is easy to see why some counties top the academic charts since they had opportunities at the door step.”

Another motion that she moved was on the need for counties to have an investment kitty. This was born out of the realization that most counties, despite receiving huge chunks of national funding, were apportioning very little for investments.

**Invest in their people**

“What was taking root is that counties were only supposed to undertake development projects and pay salaries. Yet, one of the fundamental functions of counties is to invest in their people. The motion was to ensure that counties invest in the people through kitties,” says the senator.

For her Kwale County, such a kitty will help the locals establish other small enterprises apart from relying on the traditional tourism ventures. Already, some of such support is showing signs of success.

The growth of various savings groups in the county has helped women and girls lift disentangle themselves from shackles of poverty. The holding of the first ever African Confederation of Co-operative Savings and Credit Associations in the County was a show of confidence that this initiatives work.

The Senator observes: “Such meetings help to demonstrate that there is great potential in our people. They only need champions to make their voice heard not just politically but economically.”

The Moi Girls Nairobi, University of Nairobi and Oxford university alumna believes despite the Constitution opening up the space for women, they cannot wait for opportunities. They have to seize the moment and become leaders.

“We are not there yet. We can celebrate for the strides made so far but we must never lose focus of the distance to be walked. We must be willing to fight for more space and true representation. It must never be a favour for women leaders,” advises Zani.

Dr Zani believes once the struggle she began is completed, the people of Kwale will give her a more senior position to fight bigger battles not just for them but for the entire Coast region.
So near, yet too far

BY AWC CORRESPONDENT

When Embu Governor Martin Wambora was impeached by the Members of County Assembly (MCAs) in 2014, Kenyans waited with bated breath to have the first ever woman governor. Dorothy Nditi Muchungu nearly claimed that history. If the impeachment had been upheld by the Court, then Muchungu would have ascended to the position by virtue of being deputy to the governor.

But governor Wambora fought his way through the courts to protect his seat and he is still in office despite the Senate
upholding the impeachment by the MCAs.

The prospect of having Dorothy at the top excited many. Women leaders and gender activists urged her to take the mantle. For a while she acted as governor while Wambora was fighting for his reinstatement in court.

“Though it was a rare window that opened, I was prepared for the challenge. I strongly believe I was equal to the task. Why would anyone question my ability? Through this opportunity I could have ably demonstrated why women should be governors and perhaps increase their chances of being elected in the next General Election,” says Muchungu.

Having acted as a governor for a short moment, she says more than ever convinced that women should go for the seat come 2017 elections. “It is achievable”, she says.

Dorothy, who hails from the far-flung Mbeere region, says she has remained conscious of her people’s three key desires: poverty alleviation, access to clean water, and good roads.

The irony is that while the locals complain of access to water, Embu County is home to some of biggest dams that contribute electricity to the national grid.

“It is not fair that most of our people don’t have access to piped water. The basic should be that we should be drinking from the dams and the rivers in the county. Our rivers have never dried.”

This is an issue that Muchungu has taken on as one of her deliverables to the people of Embu County. She is spearheading a campaign to have them connected to clean water. Her belief is that access to clean water will cut significantly money spend to treat waterborne diseases. These resources can be rechanneled to address other pressing needs.

Her efforts are paying off. Most families have access to water and they are now reporting fewer waterborne diseases, she says. Her water initiative is entering new phase with more families set to benefit.

The deputy governor has also initiated projects aimed at boosting the standards of education in the county. She is doing this through construction, renovation and equipping of schools.

“I am keen on improving the standards of education in the county. Education is the only way to unlock the potential in our youth and enable them to compete nationally for opportunities.”

-Dorothy Nditi Muchungu
Deputy Governor Embu County

The county is also establishing centres of excellence aimed at promoting good performance.

“The talk for good results in academics is not enough. What I aspire for is that we have the centres of excellence spread across the county. That is the only way we can have identifiable role models to inspire others in the county.”

She says all her initiatives are geared towards bringing real change to the lives of people of Embu County.

“We are preparing our people to seize opportunities both at the county and national levels. For me, I am doing my level best to contribute to the proper functioning of this devolved system of governance.”

But Muchungu attributes her ability to deliver on her functions to the management skills she gained in her previous engagements.

The former high school teacher had a stellar performance when she sat at the Gachoka Constituency Development Fund and the Tana Water Services Board.

“What these two bodies inculcated in me is the value of prioritizing issues and the prudent use of resources. In all my current initiatives, I strive to align and utilize resources according to priorities. That is the best way to uplift lives and create change for the electorate.”

She is currently the secretary general of the deputy governors’ forum and also a member of the Kenya Network of Women Governors. She sees these forums as a launching pad to higher offices.

“I believe women can be able governors. Women governors can deliver where others are failing the country,” she says confidently.

Though she is not keen to talk about the office she is going to vie for in the next elections, the former Kyeni Girls’ High School and Kenyatta University student believes her current work will position her for something come 2017.
There will be a woman president in Kenya after we the current leaders prove to society that women are good enough to steer this country to greater heights.”

These are the words of Kwale County Deputy Governor, Fatuma Mohamed Achani, one of the nine females holding that position in the country. Fatuma believes the work she has done so far in projecting the concerns of her people and pushing for the realization of the rights of women and girls has proved to the people that women leadership is valuable.

“The people will one day say the Deputy Governor was a champion of women and girls’ rights in the community and with the Governor, they worked very hard to uplift the living standards of the people of Kwale County.”

This, the 36-year-old lawyer and graduate of Moi University believes, believe will be the people’s verdict. Her concern about the welfare of women and girls is informed by the sorry state the two are in.

Fatuma says many girls in the county drop out of school due to early pregnancies and early marriages. One of the major causes of this development is the high poverty levels that push young girls into early marriages. Yet, Kwale County has many resources including titanium, exotic beaches, and high

Fatuma Mohamed Achani
class hotels that should make poverty history.

But the irony is that in the midst of these resources, over 50 per cent of the population live in poverty “because previous regimes failed to come up with relevant programmes to address the economic challenges facing the county”, she says.

Fatuma says it because of this prevailing situation she got interested in politics as a platform to helping her people. “I decided to go for the position of deputy governor to help uplift the education standards of girls, by making sure that those from poor families can also access education through bursaries.

Since I and the governor took over the leadership of the County, we have ensured that children who qualify to join national schools receive full sponsorship. This is to motivate and encourage others to excel in education.”

Her other focus area is reducing maternal mortality by putting in place systems that are able to prevent these deaths from occurring in the first place. She has done this by ensuring that there are fully functional maternities in every dispensary in the county.

She says she has ensured this happens by pushing for increased budgetary allocation to the healthcare sector.

In addition to the improved maternity serves, Fatuma’s and the governor’s leadership is credited with setting aside funds to help women improve their incomes from farming. In this regard, they are availing the women with free tractors and farm inputs to improve agricultural productivity.

So far so good, she says. Her understanding of the problems afflicting women and the need to come up strategic interventions seems to have been shaped when she was working at the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA Kenya). While at FIDA, she was involved in training the community on the Constitution and women leaders on how to win political seats.

She thinks the things that are affecting election of women are: Culture, Party, Tribe and Money. Perceptions, cultural beliefs and lack of financial stability in society hinder women from being elected into high positions including the presidency, she laments.

For her, the down-to-earth approaches to issues, honesty, a clean track record, and previous engagement with the people at the grass roots level helped her sail through with less difficulty.

Still, it was not easy. “There are people who naturally have low confidence in women leaders and there are other leaders who are not ready for transformational changes; they believe women shouldn’t be anywhere near the high table.”

Fatuma hopes come 2017, the residents of Kwale County would have seen what she has done and assess her favourably. She says she going to run for the same position in 2017 because she has to complete her projects which are currently running.

“My governor has given me a lot of support in doing my work. In the next elections, I will be his running mate once again. After that I will think of going for a higher position.”

-Fatuma Mohamed Achani, Kwale County Deputy Governor,
Senator shows the value of women leadership

BY FAITH MUIRURI

When her courage was recently put to test through expulsion from the UDF party over her alleged association with the Jubilee government, she rubbished the move and termed it illegal. This is Senator Martha Wangari, who has been able to stake her rightful claim in the political arena.

In the senate, where she is the vice chair of the Senate committee on Labour and Social welfare, she has proved herself as an independent thinker.

She is also the Deputy Secretary, Kenya Women Parliamentarian Association (KEWOPA) and serves as an executive member on the Kenya Young Parliamentarians Association Executive committee.

Further she sits in the committee on Land and Natural resources and the County Public Accounts and Investments committee.

But one things is true about Senator Wangari; she has remained true to her conviction in advancing the youth and women agenda. She has introduced six bills over the last three years with the most notable piece of legislation being the County Government Amendment Bill (No.2) 2014.

The bill seeks to ensure that County Governments only sit after all the nominated members have been gazetted and sworn on the same day as is the practice in the National Assembly and the Senate.

According to the Senator, this move will ensure that women and youths nominated to these assemblies compete on an equal basis with their male counterparts for leadership positions in the Assemblies.

Wangari who is among young legislators in the senate, is credited for pushing the Parliamentary Service Commission (PSC) to facilitate lactating women parliamentarians and staff to enjoy a conducive environment to look after their babies.

This she says was a bold move that no other Member of Parliament has done since independence and is designed to address discrimination that lactating mothers faced in Parliament.

“As a result of my bold step, the PSC resolved that effective July 1, 2013 that all lactating mothers under the Parliamentary service commission would be facilitated to carry with them their infants who are one year old or less and a care-giver whenever they travel on parliamentary business within the country.”

This she says has benefited both lactating parliamentarians and members of Staff in Parliament.

Legislative agenda
She has introduced the Self Help Associations Bill 2015 which is set
to benefit both the youth and the women at the constituency level. The Bill seeks to provide the necessary legal framework for the registration of self-help associations and the necessary mechanisms for their regulation.

“The self-help associations have helped the women and the youth of this country to pool their meagre resources for the common goal of regenerating wealth,” she explains.

She says that the Senate Committee on Labor and Social Welfare will soon be conducting public participation forums across the counties to enable the public to give their input before the bill is presented in the house for the second reading.

The legislator has also proposed an amendment to the Employment Act with a view to ensuring that employees who adopt a child pursuant to section 154 of the Children Act qualify for leave.

The Employment Act presently provides for maternity and paternity leave, to biological children, but does not provide for adoptive leave. This means that where an employee adopts a child, the employee may not have the opportunity to care for and nurture the child as the employee would have in the case of a biological child.

The Bill which, is now in the second reading stage seeks to ensure that the rights of adopted children are safeguarded and that an opportunity for parental care and protection is availed to adopted children on their adoption.

A first time legislator, Wangari has been pushing to amend the National Hospital Insurance Fund law to reduce the penalties imposed by the Act for late payment of standard and special contributions.

She says that the penalty as imposed by the Act serves as a deterrent to defaulters who may wish to continue remitting funds. Currently defaulters are fined five times the premiums due plus the actual premium.

The Bill is currently before the Senate Standing Committee for Public Participation before it is brought back to the house for the second reading stage.

The Senator has also sought many statements in the house and currently wants to establish the criteria used by the ministry of education to enrol pupils who sat for KCPE in 2014 to secondary schools. She also wants the Ministry to explain how the enrolment criteria compare with previous years and the steps the ministry is taking to ensure that those who missed out on form one admission receive their right to education as enshrined in Constitution of Kenya (2010).

In addition, the senator has also sought a statement regarding the deteriorating medical care standards with specific reference to quack doctors. In the statement, she wants the government to give statistical figures of the genuine medical practitioners and the quacks.

She has donated books and sanitary towels to several schools and is currently drilling a borehole for a community in Gilgil constituency.

“This will serve thousands of residents and comes with a 100,000 litres storage tank and helps to keep children in school by strengthening the school feeding programmes.

But it has not been success after success. She has had to confront several challenges as well. Wangari says that the bar code for women in Parliament is generally higher than that of men.

“The increased numbers in representation gave the public a view that women issues should be executed better. We are therefore under constant pressure and male MPs take the chance to bash and label us flower girls in parliament.”

She says that this is quite demoralizing especially for the first time members who are working tirelessly to fulfill their mandate.

But she calls on women to learn to work together and create a support group. She notes that the nature of our politics requires resources and thus women must learn how to fundraise and take the forefront in political parties if they are to make an impact the next election.

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Martha Wangari, Senator UDF
Politics is not for the faint hearted. This is true for Peris Tobiko, who had to summon all her energies and strategies to clinch the Kajiado East Parliamentary seat.

Battle lines were drawn from the onset. Maasai elders on the one hand “cursed” her after she trounced seven TNA aspirants in the primaries. The elders maintained that it was against tradition for women to eye leadership positions and threatened to put a curse on anyone who supported her bid.

“The women on the other hand became jittery and were not sure if I had made the right move,” adds the MP during a recent interview.

However, Tobiko managed to pull a surprise by capturing the seat to become the first Maasai woman to be elected in the parliamentary history.

This was her second attempt after she unsuccessfully contested for the parliamentary seat in 2007. Although she did not win, the votes she garnered helped her to strengthen her resolve to seek political office in the coming years.

“I think the idea of a woman leader was still new to my people,” she said of her 2007 loss. “But the votes I got gave me the confidence to try again.”

After her loss, she went on to initiate development projects in Kajiado, including drilling boreholes to provide water for residents of the semi-arid area. To her, these initiatives gave her an edge over her opponents during the 2013 elections.

Her campaign agenda focused on empowering women and youth. And today she has embarked on a number of development projects to meet these very election pledges.

At the Constituency level, the MP has started a Kshs 1 million motivational trophy for schools. “Any school that leads in national exams at the Divisional level, they
receive Ksh 1 million from the CDF kitty.”

She says that schools in the Constituency are now competing for the Ksh 1 million trophy and these has helped to uplift standards of education in the area.

“Once they get the one million, the schools are able to finance projects of their choice. Instead of building a classroom for them, they compete for the money to put up the project. This has excited them a lot and uplifted the standards of education in the constituency,” she explains.

The MP has also been able to educate many children to the university level and thereafter secure jobs for them.

“I have not just stopped at educating them but ensuring they get jobs,” she says and cites Equity Bank, the Teachers Service Commission and the Public Service Commission among institutions that have helped to boost this initiative.

**Strategy**

The MP has further ensured that locals benefit from contracts awarded under CDF. “This seeks to encourage the community to diversify their sources of livelihood. Instead of relying solely on livestock, they can still prosper as entrepreneurs. It is very exciting when you see the Maasai engaging in construction work,” she adds.

Through UWEZO funding, the legislator has been able to encourage a number of women and youth to start businesses. “I have seen beneficiaries prospering among them young men who have started a petrol station while others are planting tree seedlings and selling them.”

The legislator points out these women are doing very well with the money and the repayment mode is very good.

Tobiko has also embarked on projects to improve the roads in her constituency and takes credit for the completion of Sultan Hamud -Mashuru road; Ilpolosat-KAG University-Kajiado road; Oloitepes- Sholinke road and Sholinke-Erankau roads.

**Contributions in National Assembly**

At the National Assembly, she seats in the committees of Labour and Social Welfare; National Cohesion and Equal Opportunities.

“I have contributed to a number of bills namely the water bill, the Transfer of Prisoners Bill and the National Social Security Fund bill.”

She has also sought a statement from the Departmental Committee on Transport, Public Works and Housing regarding the effects of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) on her constituents.

“We need to address the social impact of the project before it takes off because the railway line cuts across a pastoral area inhabited by livestock and the wildlife and is likely to affect livelihoods.”

The MP at the same time says that challenges are many adding that just because she is a woman, people expect her to be very soft. “Anybody who has a financial problem expects you to resolve it.”

She notes that most people have always tried to blackmail her especially in relation to the position she takes over issues.

“Sometimes people want to dictate to you and run the show on your behalf. Even in instances where I need to give direction, there are some male “supporters” who still believe that women should step aside regardless of their positions and watch as things unfold as opposed to being an active participants.”

But she has learnt to be firm on pertinent issues in the Constituency. “Trying to be too soft will not help you in leadership. You need to be firm, focused and have your own direction first before you can give others direction. You need to know what you want to achieve because there are too many advisers,” she notes.

Her message to fellow women is to go for competitive seats instead of waiting for the affirmative action ones.

She notes that most women have been boxed to a corner. “When they offer themselves for leadership, men tell them to run for that special seat, as though they do not qualify for other positions. I believe if women are empowered economically, men will be the ones calling for affirmative action.”

The MP says that women must also learn the art of mobilizing resources to be able to mount successful campaigns. “Women aspiring for elective seats must mobilize enough resources and be ready to solicit for votes just like their male counterparts,” she says.

Come the next elections, she is going to use her development track record to reclaim her seat. “I will be banking on my development record to reclaim her seat.”

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Come the next elections, she is going to use her development track record to reclaim her seat. “I will be banking on my development record to defend my seat.”

“I want them to do their own assessment based on what I had promised and what I have delivered.”

She is confident that she will win the seat with a bigger margin come 2017. “I have managed to set the bar very high now and inject a new kind of leadership which I strongly believe, gives me an edge over my opponents,” she says in an upbeat tone.
When those who have for decades pushed for democratization and empowerment of women in Kenya are feted, one woman who is not likely to miss on the list is 62-year-old Mrs Adelina Mwau, the Deputy Governor, Makueni County.

She stood out among those who went against the grain even when it meant risking it all to fight for the rights of women, the marginalized and oppose an oppressive constitution.

“We actively participated in campaigning for a reformed Constitution because we believed it was not fair to women and the nation at large. We remained faithful to Mwau’s name and contribution is also easily recognizable in countries such as South Africa, Uganda, Sudan and Tanzania, indicating her appeal beyond Kenya in regard to championing gender rights.

A former nominated Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister, Mwau adores the subject of participatory leadership. She says this is the only progressive way to do things.

“For many years, we have lived in the shadow of a male dominated and biased society. Women have successfully been denied the space to participate in critical decision making processes. This is what I have fought all my years as a believer of gender inclusiveness in society,” she says.

Her nomination as the running-mate and subsequent election as Deputy Governor was a reward for her many years of dedication towards women rights. It was also an icing on the cake for her efforts to show that women have what it takes to hold senior decision making positions.

“Even though I had been a crusader for equal participation, I had been a victim of a patriarchal system. May be, it was the price I was paying for challenging the status quo. The office of the deputy governor was an opportunity for me to intensify my advocacy on equality in national affairs."

As she started her job more than two years ago, Mwau’s work was cut out. She knew that she was expected to use her position to, among other things, advance the wellbeing of women.
She chose to direct her energies on school girls. Her intention was – and still is – to start them off in the right path while they are still young.

“Women start drifting towards the unequal sector during their learning days. For example, girls who lack adequate supply of sanitary towels are easily forced to stop schooling because of the psychological effects it causes. This means that we are likely to end up with more boys completing school as compared to girls who fall on the way. Obviously, this lays a foundation and disadvantages girls’ participation in the social, economic and political spheres of the society.”

To address this challenge, the deputy governor started the Menstruation Management and Hygiene Practices in rural primary and secondary schools in Makueni County. Under the initiative, girls are provided sanitary pads to enable them go through the cycle without stress. The results have been impressive. A higher number of girls from poor backgrounds have been able to remain in school, with episodes of absenteeism significantly reduced.

She knows that keeping girls in school longer is a good thing for the country as they are likely to become productive and ensure quality lives for themselves and their families.

Besides promoting enrolment and retention of girls in schools, access to clean water for the residents of the County is another of her key projects.

Most of Makueni is dry and lack of water is a perennial problem. Over the years, women and girls trekked long distances in search of water, which made them not only waste a lot of time that could have been spent doing other economically viable activities; but also exposed them to dangers.

The other negative consequence of this scarcity of water was the high number of school lessons missed or drop-outs among the girls as they went to search for this commodity.

Since Mwau’s intervention, school-going girls no longer abandon classes to search for water. This is having a positive knock-off effect on their academic performance.

“We have ensured access to water through the sinking of boreholes. The result has been that women now spend most time in their small businesses while girls are now reporting to school daily. This is great for our people.”

The boreholes are also driving up the agricultural potential in the county as people use the water to irrigate crops in this otherwise dry region. Indeed, more and more people are getting hooked onto the water supply for the small agri-business ventures.

Mwau says her small contribution in this direction is also improving the food situation in the county and incomes for most households.

“Families are not facing hunger now as was in the past. Households are boasting of improved incomes and purchasing power.”

Still, a lot remains to be done. But the Master of Arts in Development Studies from Hague, Netherlands believes creating positive impact and setting examples will build a strong legacy for her.

“We may have faced challenges in the past but I am not willing to be defined by such circumstances,” says Mwau.

The next elections in 2017 are key to her. But she prefers to keep her decision close to her chest. For now, she just wants to serve her people.

The other thing she is doing is educating, particularly women, to acquire Identity Cards and register as voters. She believes this is the only weapon they have to elect leaders who will help them achieve their desire for a better life.

She believes she has done a lot for the residents of Makueni and the people of Kenya, but she wants them to judge her work.

“It is them who will judge and decide what I will get. I am serving them for now,” says Adelina, with a broad smile.
Omondi defies odds to secure Senate nomination

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Senator Godliver Omondi rose to political fame during the clamour for the new Constitution. The Senator, who was representing Persons with Disability in the panel reviewing the Constitution, says her political journey started with this important process.

She recalls that during the referendum, she aligned herself with the Yes campaign and was actively engaged in sensitizing persons with disability and the general public on the importance of voting for the new Constitution.

She was able to mingle with the high and mighty in the political arena and this exposure awoke her personality and she begun to aspire for a political seat.

“I wanted to be among the first persons to join politics under the new Constitution and make laws that are disability friendly,” adds the former vice chair of the United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK).

However, her political journey was not smooth sailing. From the onset, she knew she did not have enough finances to run for a political seat. She also knew that the Constitution had earmarked two nomination slots for persons with disability in the Senate.

The legislator had to rely mainly on skills she acquired from a training organized by National Democratic Institute to secure a nomination in the senate. She registered as a member of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and decided to use her little resources in support of party activities.

The Senator made sure she attended all their political rallies. “I always made sure that I positioned myself strategically to be visible,” she adds.

“I could lobby to be allowed to address the political rallies and speak on issues relating to Persons with Disabilities to endear myself with the party leadership right from the grassroots.”

This helped her to keep abreast with developments in the political arena. She also managed to secure a lead position in the ODMs nomination list.

“I redoubled my efforts in support of the party because I knew my nomination has been sealed since the Constitution provides that this is a closed list and once submitted to the IEBC, it cannot be subjected to any changes. I knew it has been gazetted and nobody can tamper with it.”

Name replaced

However, she got a rude shock after the elections when her name was replaced shortly before being gazetted.

She recalls that being in the nomination list was grueling task and now having to challenge the party’s decision was the biggest challenge.

She did not have any resources...
to move to court and efforts to nullify the process through IEBC were futile.

“I went to see Isaak Hassan who was rude to me. He told me there is nothing the commission can do as he had already signed the approved list for gazettement and if I still felt aggrieved, I should go to court.”

She knew she had exceptionally high chances of winning the case and this encouraged her to fight to the end. “I went to court with support from well wishers and I thank God the ruling was made in my favour and I was sworn in after unsuccessful appeals by my opponents.”

Omondi who represents persons with disability is known for never turning her back to a needy person who approaches her for help.

She has often dug deep into her own pocket to educate needy children. “With my salary, I have started a project on education dubbed Mtoto asome initiative. According to the legislator, the initiative targets learners with disabilities, orphans and other needy students, who have dropped out of school for lack of fee.

“Currently, I am working on structures and very soon, more needy students will benefit from this kitty,” she explains adding that at the moment, around 76 students are benefiting from this initiative.

Achievements recorded

The Senator has also initiated the construction of two secondary schools in Matungu Constituency, both of them mixed schools; one Christian school and the other Muslim school to create a friendly and conducive learning environment.

“St Mary’s Namasanga and Namulungu Muslim Secondary school started soon after I became a Senator are now fully operational with students in Forms one and two.”

The legislator mainly focuses on programmes aimed at not only alleviating poverty but breaking its vicious cycle.

Welfare project

Her projects at the constituency level are doing well. Among them is a welfare project which is being implemented under the Godliver community support initiative. “I have bought a pick up, tents and plastic chairs which are mainly used during funerals. The pickup is also used to transport sick people to the hospital or the body from mortuary free of charge.

Her other initiatives include her recent launch of a boda boda Sacco in Matungu Constituency. “I am planning to issue them with insurance covers. I have asked their leadership to look for disciplined boda boda riders to benefit from the initiative.”

The Senator has also managed to move to different counties to do oversight and see how budget allocations are done, and if disability is considered. “I have told the Migori County assembly to make sure when budgeting for women and youth, they must also budget for persons with disabilities.

Recently, she launched a caucus for women with disability in Migori County and the government has agreed to allocate unspecified amounts of money to the caucus.

In addition to all this, she has managed to commission and launch a fish pond project for PWDs in the same County.

“Next month, I will be launching the Bungoma County disability Sacco and the governor has agreed to inject some money in support of the initiative.”

She says that she will soon be launching a disability human care centre in Kakamega County, a concept she has borrowed from Japan, which aims at having a pool of Personal Assistants (PAs) trained specifically to handle different types of disabilities among them interpreters in sign language, those who can handle wheel chairs, and guide the visually impaired.

“If there are big meetings in neighbouring Busia, Vihiga, Kakamega, Trans Nzoia and Bungoma counties, the centre can provide sign language interpreters at a fee. The money raised from such ventures can be used to sustain the centre.”

She says this centre will also serve as a rescue centre for persons with disability and especially survivors of sexual violence.

The Senator who sits in the National Cohesion and Equal Opportunities, Health, Delegated Legislation, Broadcasting and Library services committees has tabled a motion that seeks to push for the creation of a county disability board. And the introduction of the County Disability and County Accessibility legislations.

“We have a National Disability Act which talks about issues of disability and cuts across all the 47 counties but the proposed legislations will address specific issues faced by persons with disability in different counties.”

The Senator also intends to establish a Sacco for the women. “I am looking for funds which will be channeled to the Sacco to enable more women to access credit from the revolving fund.”
Community work pays dividends for Chelule

BY FAITH MUIRURI

Senator Liz Chelule is a seasoned politician. Her political career spans over a decade. She has been in the grassroots for more than 20 years during her involvement with the Gender Equity Network, an organization that seeks to empower women.

Chelule has also been contesting for parliamentary seats since 2002. In that year, she contested for the Kuresoi parliamentary seat but lost to the incumbent Zakayo Cheruiyot. This did not discourage her and in 2007, she contested for the same seat again but lost.

This experience only served to strengthen her resolve to champion for the rights of the community. She was able to connect more with the people through the Gender Equity Network and initiate several development projects among them the construction of a maternity wing at Keringet Health Centre where she had served as a chairperson.

Chelule who is a renowned advocate for women rights, mobilized women into groups and together they were able to buy land from the defunct Nakuru County Council. They then ventured into real estate business.

The senator also spearheaded initiatives to rehabilitate five dams, six springs and a tree planting programme. Through the network, she also started Ngata baby centre for children abandoned by their parents as well as helped to build over 200 churches.

Change of tact

During the 2013 General Elections she changed tact and vied for the Nakuru County Women Representative seat on a URP ticket but still lost.

Her unrelenting spirit and determination nevertheless earned her a nomination in the senate.
According to Chelule, the URP leadership was inspired by her consistency in the political arena and nominated her to the senate.

At the senate, she has taken to advancing the women’s agenda and is currently pushing for the consolidation of funds set aside for the special interest groups to enable them tap into the 30 percent procurement quota.

She notes that the women, youth and persons living with disabilities are faced with challenges in executing tenders due to lack of collateral required by financial institutions to secure loans.

**Oversight**

The legislator wants an oversight body created to train and build the capacities of women and youth at the grassroots levels in order for them to better understand the processes involved and to qualify in the big tenders as well.

“While the policy is a move in the right direction, access remains a major hurdle especially for women in the rural areas. The process of accessing the funds is tedious and groups are required to produce a three month bank statement which is unrealistic for new groups,” she explains adding that there is need to create a national board that will work with the people.

In the last financial year out of the 5,354,400,000 disbursed to the 290 Constituencies, the board has approved 4,240,400,000 for funding to groups that met the eligibility criteria as provided for in the Public Finance Management (Uwezo fund) Regulations 2014. The funds have benefitted 42,800 groups across the country out of which 26,838 are women groups, 14, 986 youth groups and 977 people living with disability.

Individuals that benefited included 491,352 comprising of 146,708 youth, 323,310 women and 21,334 Persons Living With Disability.

At the Senate, Chelule is a member of the Energy, Roads and Transport committee; Land and Natural resource committee; Committee on Delegated legislation.

Improving road network, agriculture, education, expansion of economic opportunities and the general well being of the people are top on her agenda.

She takes credit for the allocation of funds towards the construction of Molo Olenguruoni road. Already the contractor is at the site and construction work is set to begin anytime soon. The Senator has also been able to mobilize resources to aid in the construction of the 8km Tendewet-Irongo road and a bridge.

**Lower interest rates**

Chelule plans to reintroduce an amendment to the Agricultural Act which seeks to lower interest rates on loans advanced to farmers through the Agricultural Finance Corporation.

“The current rates are exorbitant and beyond the reach of most farmers. My proposal is to lower the interest rates to 6 percent to enable more farmers access credit,” she explains.

The legislator is also seeking a statement from the Agricultural Committee following delays in the implementation of the potato law in Kenya which outlaws any packaging of the produce in bags exceeding 50 kg.

“Although the court has suspended its implementation, there is need to come up with measures to stop further exploitation of farmers by middlemen and brokers,” says the legislator during an interview at her Nairobi office.

At the constituency level, the MP has embarked on a number of development projects which include the construction of Korao Girls Secondary school. The school which is expected to become operational in January 2016, targets 90 girls who are faced with the risk of early pregnancies and marriages.

**Empowered**

The legislator also plans to develop a cultural centre where people could come and learn more of their cultures and how to make traditional delicacies. The initiative targets to bring together the elderly from the Mau area who will be empowered economically. She says that they will be engaged in income generating ventures to make them self reliant and address loneliness which comes with old age. The senator will then market their products.

These investments, she hopes, will not be in vain. Her work further shows what women need to do to ensure they are as competitive as their male counterparts when it comes to political positions.

One of the lessons she has learnt is that women need to be supported to make a mark in the male dominated political field.

The other is for women to win elective seats, they must invest in strong campaign teams and be willing to attend all political rallies to sell their agenda.
Delivering for community, delivers a political post for Musyoka

BY FAITH MUIRURI

One thing that Dr Susan Musyoka never contemplated when she began community work was that this action was launching her future political career.

As a private medical practitioner, the legislator worked closely with the community and trained scores of community health workers in a bid to enhance access to quality health care in Machakos County.

She came face to face with abject poverty and hopelessness amongst women and youth, most of them yearning for somebody to speak for them.

Dr Musyoka stepped in to take up this role which would later propel her into the limelight as she fought for truth, fairness and justice.

Access Justice

"I helped many people to access justice, which helped me to hone my leadership skills and prepare myself for service to the community," she explains during an interview with the African Woman Child Feature Service (AWCFS).

Her service to the community would yield hefty returns when she contested and won the Machakos Woman Representative seat during the 2013 General Elections.

In Parliament, Dr Musyoka has set her eyes on women and youth issues and is keen on good governance and poverty alleviation.

The MP who is the founder of the Machakos County Savings and Credit facility now says that a huge percentage of the newly established Affirmative Action Social Development fund will be channelled through the Sacco to enable more women access credit.

"I will channel some money to the Sacco so that more women can access credit, engage in table banking, and improve their income generating ventures at the local level."

Revolving fund

The legislator says that she plans to establish a revolving fund at the county level, which will help women improve their businesses.

She is also keen on promoting gender responsive legislations
and has tabled a motion on the prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation in the National Assembly. The motion seeks to boost the fight against FGM by proposing that the school curriculum focuses more on the adverse effects of FGM so that students are made aware of measures they can take to stop the retrogressive act.

“Although we have a law that outlaws FGM, the practise is still going on and women are suffering quietly. As leaders, we have a responsibility to protect innocent girls,” she adds.

The MP has added another feather to her cap and is the current chair of a parliamentary caucus that promotes use of evidence by the legislature in its decisions.

“The caucus which is still new is pushing for more use of evidence in parliamentary oversight and decision making roles to help enrich parliamentary debate.”

**Approach**

“We want all parliamentarians to embrace this approach so that we can come up with responsive laws. This will also ensure that parliamentary debates are not reactionary but based on research.”

She says this will be important when, for instance, during debate on the budget, “we are able to interrogate more on how the money was used during the previous financial year before proposing additional allocations.”

The MP who is also a member of the House Business Committee, says that the caucus is an initiative of the African parliamentarians Network on development evaluation where she serves as the vice chair.

“The network seeks to promote the use of evidence and make sure that parliamentary debates are based on concrete evidence,” she adds.

Dr Musyoka who is a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Health has been instrumental in shaping the Health Bill which is at the second reading stage.

“As a committee, we have proposed many changes in the way the Health Bill is structured and hope the bill will help shape the way health care is handled in this country,” she affirms.

Her priorities for her constituents include providing clean drinking water and raising education standards.

She says that part of the money disbursed to the County through the Affirmative Action kitty will go towards supporting very needy girls, boys and persons with disability who have not been able to access bursaries awarded through CDF.

**Resources**

The legislator says that women in the County will also be trained on financial management to enable them use wisely resources at their disposal.

“I want them to do more than table banking. Currently, we are focusing on value addition projects undertaken by women. We have an ongoing initiative in Kathiani Sub County where about 200 women are engaged in food processing, drying vegetables, posho mill and baking bread.

She says that the group will be allocated funds to help them develop structures that can boost their respective ventures.

Once the initiative becomes fully operational, women can sell their products and earn a living besides the income they get from planting and selling tree seedlings.

In the other sub counties, she is going to establish ICT centres so that women cannot only access more information on different income generating activities but also help demystify issues of computer among women in the rural areas.

The legislator also plans to work with other leaders in the area to help identify and nurture talents among the youth to enable them exploit available opportunities.

Dr Musyoka says that challenges are many and vary from the high expectations from the electorate to the vast county where her presence as a leader must be felt.

“I have eight constituencies in my county and apart from moving from one constituency to another, my presence has to be felt through the projects I implement.

One this is making credit accessible to 1,000 women through the Machakos County Sacco and hope that this will help transform their livelihoods.

**Challenges**

But the biggest challenge is having a life of your own, she says. “You belong to the people; they own you and being in the limelight everyone looks up to you.”

“One is lost in a sea of responsibility and events,” she says adding that as much as life as a legislator may be hectic, she has had to adjust accordingly and is enjoying every minute of it.

Dr Musyoka will be defending her seat during the 2017 General Elections and challenges women to claim their space in all spheres of leadership and not to allow men to pull them down.
Winning the hearts of voters for her agenda for women

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

If there is one thing that made Mary Mbugua popular, then is her teaching on family values on stations such as the Inooro FM, Kameme FM, and the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, which earned her the name Mutumia Ngatha (Kikuyu for a Woman of Virtue).

The trained marriage counselor and a teacher by profession, Mbugua has always believed that charity begins at home and that building a harmonious home has far-reaching benefits on the nation at large.

She posts a litany of talents including singing. It is her music and the song dubbed ‘Mutumia Ngatha’ (Woman of Virtue) that catapulted her to fame among the Kikuyu community.

“I use my talents to encourage women to be bold, virtuous and hard working because when a woman is progressive, her children will go to school and her husband is inspired to become all he can be," she says.
Master Key

“I often say that a woman is like a master key that can open any door.”

She has founded more than 1,000 women groups across the country to help women do table banking, invest in projects, and share lessons and experiences. This has made her so popular among many people, proving that when women pursue a popular cause, their popularity in society rises.

This passion to inspire and nurture drove her to the teaching profession “I had the capacity to pursue any other career but teaching sat very well with my personal goals. I wanted to teach people.”

Though she is the Women Representative for Nakuru County on The National Alliance Party (TNA), politics was never her cup of tea. She recalls how in the 1990 she has turned a nomination offer from former President Moi to represent Molo constituency.

The former Tact Tutor -or a teacher in-charge of other teachers- comes across as a purpose driven woman, firm but gentle when the situation demands.

Her turning point in politics came after the promulgation of a new Constitution in 2010.

“About four delegations came to my home in Molo, they told me that there was a new seat created called the Women Representative. I loved that name because I am all about the woman,” she says.

Her husband, now deceased, told her that if Kenyans see her fit and give her the job, she should rise to the occasion and do it.

Campaigning to be voted in as a representative of an entire County was not easy, particularly because Nakuru County is one of the hotbeds of Kenyan politics.

“You must develop a thick skin and people can really abuse you, some said I am too old for the seat. But I responded that it is called the Women Representative and not Girls Representative. I was the best and still am the best for this position because I have a lot of experience,” she emphasizes.

She says that the brand she had built for years as a campaigner of women issues made her campaign easier.

Mbugua however says that resources are always an issue for a politician and even more so for women. The going gets rougher for those without principles or a cause on which to hinge their campaign.

“One must always have a clear agenda of what they intend to address once in power and direct their energies in bringing this change,” she advises.

“Personality politics is a real issue in this country and I would advise other women to be issue driven and avoid personality politics.”

Young girls must strive to be educated and pursue a career, but when a mistake has occurred resulting in an early pregnancy, let us encourage these girls to get back on track,” Mary Mbugua, Politician

Although her agenda is about women, she observes that women are not homogeneous.

“We have the single mothers, widowed, young women, the elderly and so on. The interventions we put in place must seek to address, in a comprehensive manner, the challenges that these diverse women face,” she says.

“Young girls must strive to be educated and pursue a career, but when a mistake has occurred resulting in an early pregnancy, let us encourage these girls to get back on track,” says the former teacher.

She says she is very passionate about education as a pathway to success. In this regard, she is involved in many mentorship programs. “One of worst forms of poverty is that of the mind. We must enrich it with information; we must constantly be in the pursuit of knowledge,” advises Mbugua.

Despite investing in life-changing programs, she has been a victim of propaganda; all aimed at derailing her from her focus. She is encouraging fellow female politicians not to walk down this path and to support each other.

Some of the lessons she has learnt include believing that she has the capacity to face challenges and be consistent in her work.

She is currently working on a Bill that seeks to address the specific needs of women in their various circumstances, particularly the widows who are becoming increasingly vulnerable.

Two years to the next general election, her in-tray of what needs to be done remains full. But Mbugua is confident come 2017; she will receive a positive assessment from the voters.
Three years ago concerned about lack of a sign language interpreter during television news bulletin, Wanjiku Muhia promised herself that one day, she will do something about it.

Then a branch manager at one of the country’s commercial banks, she knew the solution lies in enactment of a law that requires all television news channels to include sign language in their prime news. But to be able to push for this changes, she needed to be a decision making position.

That is why in 2013 she resigned from her job and contested for the Women Representative position for Nyandarua County. She won.

Her first mission in Parliament was to ensure that a law was passed requiring TV channels to take in account people with hearing disability.

“For the news channels, it was as if these people did not exist in our country,” she says

Through the Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Bill 2013, which she moved in the national assembly, broadcast news anchoring got a new face; a sign language interpreter was included.

“By ensuring that all the people now enjoy news is by all means an achievement of inclusivity in society. In a big way, that fulfils what the Constitution requires of the State.”
This is no mean contribution by this first-time MP. Although not all news stations have effected this law, she is sure very soon they will all have sign language interpreters in their news bulletins and other programmes.

In parliament, she is also making a difference. As a member of the Administration and National and Regional Integration committees, she is contributing to advancement and success of national and regional governments.

But Wanjiku says it is not easy being a County Women Representative. While they are expected to do so much and contribute to development initiatives, County women MPs are not allocated any funds to initiate such programmes. This has made them an easy target for attacks by competitors who say there is nothing they are doing.

“There are those who saw us as just joy riders who were only drawing huge salaries without a clear job description. Our colleagues who have a kitty seem more relevant to the electorate than us.

As we battled with this negative perception, the promises we had made to the electorate begged for attention. There was no way I was going to sit and watch the voters who had faith in me despair.”

Without a Kitty, she began initiating projects heavily financed from her salary. To many, she sent the message that women leadership makes a huge difference.

Women and youth were requesting for capital to start small enterprises. In most cases, I used my salary to give them a small capital to start-off.

One of the lessons that I have learnt is that a leader is best defined by the sacrifices he or she makes for her society. Sacrificing as little as Sh1, 000 can make a difference to our rural women and youth who are in most cases held back by small capital.”

“By ensuring that the fund is well shared, we are now witnessing more young women and youth participate fully in the county and national economy,” she says.

With offices spread in all the sub-counties, Wanjiku says the county government should place advertisements for tenders on the notice boards to reach everyone.

By doing, she says, it ensures that women and the youth get up to 35 per cent of the local tenders.

On personal growth, Wanjiku is enhancing her leadership and advocacy skills to enable her to not only realize her ambitions, but to also realize the wishes of her electorate.

As a member of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA), she has been learning bargaining and advocacy skills.

“It is not easy to deal the government as an individual but with such bodies; it becomes easier to call for action.”

She says is also acutely aware that there are many projects she needs to complete before 2017 if the electorate is to take her seriously as leader.

“There is a lot I need to do to improve the fortunes of the people. Why are we not fulfilling the mandate they gave us? What good have we done with our current positions?” she poses.

“I came into the office with a clear goal of achieving results for the electorate. For now, I am firmly keeping my eye on the ball,” says Wanjiku.
Dagane believes women leadership is the answer to societal problems

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

When Gini Dagane received a paltry 57 votes in 1997 while vying on the National Democratic Party for a councilor position for Lagdera ward, she vowed not to run again for a political office.

“To me, this meant that my people had rejected me and so I retreated and withdrew from all political engagements,” she says.

But come 2013, she changed her decision. A Member of Parliament approached her and encouraged her to vie on The National Alliance (TNA) Party, under the Jubilee Alliance.

“North Eastern was a CORD zone. So asking me to throw my weight under TNA was going to be a great undertaking. In fact, there is only one MP on TNA in my area,” she explains.

“Though I had not expressed any interest to vie since the 1997, I had built a strong brand as a campaigner of people’s rights, helping me have a significant influence,” she says.

Dagane explains that many people do not understand or are unaware that there are
unknown forces on the ground that do a lot of work for the preferred candidates to an extent they become so powerful that politicians seek them out.

This is the profile she had built: An asset that many politicians look for when identifying a partner to work with.

“Though CORD was very strong on the ground, we managed to have four elected Members of the County Assembly on TNA. For this, the party rewarded me with a nomination.”

Dagane says the political life of a Muslim woman is very difficult but in the same breadth encourages other women to join the arena.

She says that unlike her, women should not take defeat as the end of the world and must be willing to try as many times as it takes.

“As women we have more power than we think. Most of the elected leaders are put there by women, either as voters or campaigners,” she says.

“In my area alone, there are about 17,000 voters and at least 10,000 are women, why do we still wait to be given leadership when we have all the votes and can easily hand this power to ourselves?”

Serving as a nominated Member of the County Assembly has presented many opportunities for her to showcase female leadership in a community where culture and religions can sometime present challenges for women seeking leadership positions.

“I am very passionate about women leadership because I know the potential we have as women. Development must be viewed through a gender lens for it to be achieved and sustained,” Dagane explains.

She gives the example of the sanitary pads where she has had greatest impact in helping improve the wellbeing of girls. “We joined forces and lobbied male leaders in the Garissa Assembly, which resulted in a budget allocation for sanitary pads for our girls in Garissa.”

**Improve issues**

Dagane says this is one of the illustrations that women involvement can improve issues such as safe motherhood and girl child education.

“My region is also notorious for the Female Genital Mutilation, early marriages, forced marriages, early motherhood and girls not going to school,” she explains.

“These are the issues confronting me as a leader and am working with other leaders, religious leaders, community leaders and even schools to put a stop to these problems.”

Though a vast majority of the women in power in North Eastern have little education because of the region’s notorious history in regard to the discrimination of women and girls, she says that “girls must stay in school and receive education to the highest attainable levels.”

For her, “education must be a part of the tools that we use to access leadership.”

True to the ability of women to multi-task, Dagane has many other responsibilities for she seats on the Agricultural, Labor and Implementation Committees.

“Women can do anything they put their minds to and the current Constitution has created many opportunities for women. It is now up to them to rise and be counted,” says Dagane.

While the law provides for women empowerment, one of the main challenges that she and other women faced was the issue of clan. Clanism is a critical issue in North Eastern and becomes even more so during elections.

“My husband and I come from different clans so this became an issue because they would say am taking votes from his community to my clan. But my husband was very supportive of me and that improved the situation,” she says.

Dagane is however quick to add that clanism as a political tool is no longer as serious as it used to be because women are taking the lead in sensitizing the community on the need for clan harmony.

On future political plans, Dagane intends to vie as a Member of the County Assembly under the Jubilee Alliance in the 2017 general elections.
Her rise in politics from a humble beginning where she used to sit under a tree at Naivasha’s Wholesale and Retail markets to being the only elected female Member of the County Assembly has awed many.

Friends and foe acknowledge the fact that it is not every day that a woman who was previously famous for selling avocado and bananas, becomes the first woman ever to be elected as the Member of the County Assembly (MCA) for the Nakuru County’s second most important Ward, Viwandani ward.

It is even more awe-inspiring when at the age of 34-years-old, she won the seat on the little known Mazingira party. How she beat candidates from popular parties such as The National Alliance Party (TNA) and the United Republican Party (URP) parties, is a story that will most likely be told for years to come.

This is Hon Eunice Muriithi, who has achieved so much since she was elected. She seats in the Speaker’s panel, meaning she plays the speakers role in the absence of the speaker and often chairs the Committee of the entire Assembly.

“I was previously employed in the hospitality industry, a job I left to explore what the Naivasha Wholesale and Retail market had for me. I was not growing in employment and I had a child to take care of,” says Muriithi.

A hotelier by profession – currently pursuing a Bachelor...
in Business Management and Leadership at St Paul University—Muriithi embodies the strength of a woman. She mingle freely with her constituency, something that has made her popular.

Another thing that has increased her popularity was the ability to transform the market days in her sub-county, opening immense opportunities to her fellow residents.

“I was the only one selling on Tuesdays because all the traders would be in Kirinyaga buying their products and managed to sell their goods starting Wednesday morning,” she explains.

“Once they realized that they too could sell on Tuesday, they made it a market day. The change I brought about was due to education, which helps you to do something more efficiently and think big,” she explains.

For Muriithi, leadership must run in her blood: her father is an ex-councilor while her great grandfather was a Paramount Chief.

Her reign as an MCA has recorded successes. She is helping with the rehabilitation of those who have been incarcerated since the Naivasha prison, which falls in her area. At the Naivasha district hospital, she has helped to set-up a casualty wing to improve how patients are received and treated.

A state of the art stadium is also in the making which she says will see at least 1,500 people gain employment. Towards turning Naivasha into a 24 hour economy, she has worked with the county authorities to ensure 30 street lights are in place.

“I value education but I also want people to begin thinking outside the box, bring your degrees to every sector of this economy where money is being exchanged, be it the market place or the bus terminus, that is how we will grow our economy,” she says.

According to Muriithi, education has inspired many of the changes that she has introduced in Viwandani. “For instance, because space is a challenge, I am working on building a four storey market that can accommodate foodstuff, clothes and even youths who are running cyber cafes.”

At the moment, one of the leading banks is in talks with her to see how fund their own women empowerment projects. This interest has not come out of nowhere. When she joined the market place in 2008, she formed the Winners Women group where some 20 women have been saving just Ksh100 each per week.

“Money is not always the problem, sometimes it is information that people need or just coming together and sharing ideas to grow our businesses,” she explains.

The advancement of women in politics needs to also come up with strategies to increase their representation.

Though many Counties across the country continue to lament the poor status of female representation in positions of leadership, she is pleased that Nakuru is leading from the front.

“Not only do we have a Madam Speaker Hon Susan Kihika who has really raised the bar and continues being a shining example of quality female leadership, we have the highest number of female elected MCAs,” she says.

There are 55 MCAs and eight of them are women elected by a public that has shown an acceptance for female leadership “they have seen that in deed women can lead, and bring change.”

While women in this county have been doing well, many like her have had to endure certain challenges. One of them is the culture of handouts.

The other is party politics and violence. “I was very naive and did not know that one person can even vote thrice in party nominations, or that votes can be hidden, as a result, I lost the TNA ticket:”

“Campaigns are a painful and very expensive, you put in Ksh30, 000 for posters today and overnight they are vandalized. You need a thick skin and a strong spirit not to be discouraged,” she explains.

She further encourages women not to despair at first sight of trouble, saying that when her campaign coffers run dry, she resorted to riding on two donkeys to move from one point to the next.

As part of lessons learnt, she says that women at times underrate themselves “when they can do it.”
Hon Salatho Ali Guhal has been a member of the Ford Kenya party for more than two decades, a consistency that is rather unique in Kenyan politics where a vast majority of politicians want to change parties as often as the situation dictates.

Having entered politics during KANU times when expressing personal democratic views could land a person in jail, Guhal says she had a challenging political journey. At one point she was arrested for expressing her views on how democracy should be seen to function.

Her rocky beginning in politics has defined her political career since. First, her community was against female leadership for many years to an extent that when she vied for a Councilor position in 2007 for Garissa-now Garissa Township, her own son was her greatest obstacle.

“I campaigned against my own mother. In my community we bring in the issue of religion when we do not want our women to vie, but religion does not prohibit women leadership,” explains her son-Sharifow Guhal who has since
changed his mind and is one of his mother’s greatest supporters.

Her son’s rejection was just one of the many obstacles that Guhal was facing. The other was vying against a man who had been the incumbent for 24 years. “I faced a lot of harassment. Many wondered how I could even dare oppose a man,” she remembers.

But even with this great opposition, Guhal had become a point woman for Ford Kenya in Garissa, campaigning vigorously for the party candidates whereby she had made a name for herself.

It was therefore not surprising when she was approached in 2007 to join the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) where her son Sharifow was a youth leader.

“People wanted to bribe me because ODM was very popular. I was just a poor woman selling vegetables and Khat (Miraa) but I stood my ground,” she says.

According to Guhal, the aim was to be a strong member of Ford Kenya where she could even join the executive committee. “This is what women should aspire for. Becoming powerful within the party where they can influence decision. At times you need not be elected to be powerful within your party of choice.”

She did not make it in the 2007 general elections and the available nomination ticket was given to a man “who was never even a member of Ford Kenya.” But she decided to stay and see what the future would bring.

People wanted to bribe me because ODM was very popular. I was just a poor woman selling vegetables and Khat (Miraa) but I stood my ground,”

Salatho Ali Guhal, nominated MCA in Garissa.

In spite of the setback, she managed to leave a strong mark. When Senator Moses Wetangula became party leader and asked for a committed party member from Garissa, her name was the first on the list.

The party proposed to her that if she failed to win in 2013 elections, the party would nominate her as a Member of the County Assembly in Garissa.

She chose to do what many women are afraid of “trusting my party”. Many women are afraid for a reason. They have been shortchanged time and time again. But Guhal believed the Ford Kenya leadership was live up to its promise.

She was right. In 2013 she became one of the first crop of leaders under the 2010 Constitution and has since put her energies into addressing security concerns in Garissa as her key agenda item.

Guhal decries the lack of sufficient Police Posts in the County citing only two in an area that is famous for being expansive. This makes it easier for criminals roam with impunity.

“I am specifically lobbying to have at least two more police posts,” she explains.

Guhal, who also serves on the House Business Committee, says her other agenda is education and quality standards that have to be adhered to.

She says her focus is women and children, whose rights she is known for promoting in the county. “I ensure that I contribute on issues critical to our mothers and children. It is very important to address the challenges that they face such as access to health services, economic opportunities and education.”

Though she says that women rights are still a concern in Garissa, it is becoming a non-issue as more and more women access power. Come 2017, she says she going to vie for an MCA position before going for bigger positions in future elections.
One woman’s political resilience pays off

BY JOYCE CHIMBI

She has survived bruising political nepotism and a long drawn court battle to emerge among the nominated Members of County Assembly (MCA) in Garissa.

This is Muhubo Omar Ahmed, who seats on the powerful Implementation Committee at the Garissa County Assembly.

She embodies the struggles and successes that women in politics endure to emerge at the top. Like many other women in her region, she has had, since 2002, to deal with a difficult political terrain.

“My challenge was bigger than I can explain to you. Being a woman in North Eastern, you are expected to be seen and not heard, it was even worse because we did not have as many women in politics as we do now.”

But her dream was much bigger than her fears and upon joining NARC-Kenya and publicly declaring her intentions to vie for a Councilor position under the old Constitution, her woes begun.

They first said that it was against religion for a woman to vie for a political seat, with vying against other men being
considered a great abomination. This was in 2002.

“My father had been a Councilor in Ijara, Garissa for more than two decades. So many people saw my campaign as a challenge to my father although I was not running against him,” Ahmed observes.

At one point both her name and that of her father were gazetted, and the people said ‘look at her putting herself as an equal with her father’. They tried to bring in culture and religion to say that I had done something disrespectful. My father and husband stood by me,” she expounds.

Having grown up in a political family, she is the only woman interested in politics, an issue that did not go down well with other family members. The backlash was discouraging.

“Every politician depends on family support first before you can go out there and build a loyal following. But if that does not happen, then problems start,” she says.

Before going into politics, Ahmed was a well known agriculturalist, a career she had built for ten years. When her passion for politics could no longer be contained, she resigned as a Junior Agricultural Assistant with the government.

She first tried her luck in 2002. She did not make. Again in 2007 and 2013, she failed to get enough votes to win. But these failures were not in vain, they came with valuable lessons.

First, Ahmed is among the very few women, if not politicians in general who have shown rare and admirable party loyalty.

She has remained a member of NARC-Kenya for more than 10 years, never once wavering.

“You must commit to the party and strive to change it from within. I tell people not to change parties as often as they change their clothes, because of my loyalty to NARC-Kenya, I am where I am today,” she explains.

Though neither she nor Karua made it, she got a nomination from the party only for a well known political family with strong political connections to replace her name with that of their sister.

This begun a court battle that would last for an entire year. A daunting task as she had to make several trips from Garissa, over 350 kilometres, to Nairobi for hearings.

“I saw a great sister in Karua, I have even slept in her house for three months as the case was going on,” says Ahmed.

Her name being replaced was not just a slap in the face of democracy but a blatant show of impunity since the family in question is influential in one of key political parties. “But since I am an ordinary poor woman, they thought that they can just take the nomination away from me and get away with it,” she says.

Her court battles now behind her; she sits firmly in NARC-Kenya’s executive committee and encourages other women not to be content with just being party members. “Being in leadership is key because the party consults you ad when there are opportunities you are always considered.”

Ahmed is passionate about girl child education, women leadership and political party democracy, things that continue to define her in Garissa and which she hopes will be an asset come 2017 general elections. She plans to vie on NARC-Kenya for an MCA position.
Garissa Nominated MCA says sky is the limit as she eyes 2017

Nominated Member of the Garissa County Assembly, Queen Teresia Titus, has always aimed high since she was in school.

Those dreams have made her go places literally and to achieve some goals that were initially beyond her wildest imaginations.

One of the dreams was to venture into politics one day and make a name in what has been described as a 'dirty game.'

In 2013, she joined Wiper Democratic Party and campaigned vigorously for the gubernatorial candidate, Nathif Jana, who later won. Her party recognized her contribution and rewarded her with a seat of a Nominated MCA, which she says: “is good but not good enough.”

After her swearing-in, Titus, who is a leading trader in Garissa town, was selected to be a member of three committees in the County Assembly made up of 48 MCAs. All elected MCAs and 18 of the Nominated MCAs, like herself, are women.

She was born and raised in Garissa and speaks Somali language fluently. She has defied the odds by being the only none Somali MCA in the County Assembly and also the only Christian.

That profile has helped her be recognized whenever she catches the Speaker’s eye and raises pertinent issues of importance that her female colleagues are shy about highlighting because of the cultural inhibitions about speaking in public and in front of men.

Says Titus: “I plan to plunge into elective politics in 2017 and vie for one of the MCA’s seat in Garissa...”
Town. I feel that I have done enough ground work.”

Indeed, the nominated MCA has turned her being a minority in the dusty town to her advantage by standing firm for her rights as a trader, a woman and a member of the Wiper Democratic Party.

“I feel I have done enough ground work and I am now ready to officially venture into politics and vie for a ward in Garissa town with a focus on the traders and how they can be helped” the Nominated MCA said.

She is an active member of the recently formed Garissa Women County Assembly Caucus which is focusing on addressing women empowerment; gender issues such as Gender Based Violence and Female Genital Mutilation, which are common, but are rarely reported to the relevant authorities due to fear, stigmatisation and ignorance of the procedures and institutions to run to for help.

Indeed, cases of GBV and FGM are rarely reported in the area due to the conservative and patriarchal society and culture of the Somalis.

The MCA says these are some of the agenda items that she plans to campaign around in the run up to the 2017 elections among others touching on women and children.

She ventured into politics in 2007, when she threw her weight behind one of the parliamentary candidates for the then Dujis parliamentary seat, then occupied by a powerful Cabinet minister, Maalim Mohamed, who had occupied it for over two decades.

Her gamble paid off. She was allowed to hold a key position in the campaign team of Aden Duale, where her voice and advice was taken seriously.

By then Titus was a leading trader in the dusty town in North Eastern Kenya where she doubled up as the chairperson of the Small-Scale and Micro-Enterprise Traders Federation, which covered the three counties of Garissa, Wajir and Moyale.

The MCA says she had some politics running in her blood by then thanks to two uncles, from the paternal and from the maternal sides, who had served as civic leader and another is Mwingi South MP, Bernard Munyoki Kitumbe, in her native Mwingi District, which is in Kitui County.

She then put all her weight and networks into play and worked overtime to ensure that Duale was elected as the Dujis MP on an ODM party ticket.

In the run up to the 2013 polls, her business contacts, mobilization skills and gender helped her open doors for herself and her candidate.

Says Titus: “The campaigns were so successful that I was inspired to consider running for a civic seat come 2017.” She is one of the 18 nominated MCAs, 16 of who are women, out of a total of 48.

But her nomination did not come easy even after she had got a nod from the WDP leader. Some of her rivals rushed to court and filed a petition contesting her name on grounds that she was not a native of the area and was favoured. The petition was heard at the Garissa court for three months and the judge ruled in her favour.

Says Titus: “The delay in hearing and concluding the petition cost me a place in the trade committee, which was my favourite, because by the time I was sworn-in, my colleagues had filled most of those slots in committees as chairmen and members.”

However, she was selected to be a member of three other committees, these are: House Business Committee; Early Childhood Development Education; and of the Labour committee.

Since then, the Nominated MCA says she has promoted debate on issues around Early Childhood Education (ECD) in the County Assembly and influenced the recruitment of many ECD teachers.

In the House Business Committee, she has always partnered with her fellow nominated women MCAs to ensure that all motions and Bills to be debated and voted on have a gender agenda and are children and family-friendly.

On the insecurity concerns in North eastern region and Garissa town in particular, she says she has used her good office as an MCA to lobby for more police posts, especially in densely populated residential areas like Garissa Ndogo and Tumaini, to be set up by the County and the national government.

Her political future looks bright, and come 2017, she is convinced that she will be contesting one of the positions.
A lot has been said about the need to encourage women to join competitive politics but Hon Habiba Abdi says that it will all come to naught if the women themselves are not ready to join the political arena.

According to the youthful politician from Garissa, “there are many progressive laws supporting women leadership but the women themselves must be proactive and show initiative.”

The nominated Member of the County Assembly of Garissa, who also serves in the Budget and Agriculture Committees, says that a quick glance at political parties and it is clear that there is a lot to be desired in as far as gender parity is concerned.

“Days when women danced for politicians are long gone, we should also aspire to have people dance and sing our praises in political parties,” she explains.

Youth need to be politically savvy to get into decision making positions, says Abdi
Though in support of political nominations, she herself is a nominee of the United Republican Party of Kenya (URP), she encourages women to be very strategic about it.

“The manner in which you are nominated determines a lot of things. You earn respect as a leader based on how you are nominated,” Abdi explains. A woman has to prove that she deserved to be nominated.

According to Abdi, she learnt several years ago that it pays to have a political agenda, something that defines you as a leader. Her political positioning is built on the youth agenda.

A youth herself, she explains that the young generation is keen on youthful leadership because they believe that it has what it takes to improve their wellbeing.

As a result, over the years, whenever politicians were meeting and political manifestos are drawn, her voice was heard demanding for a share for young people.

She says young people should invest their time and energies in political party affairs for them to be noticed and consulted when the party is about to make one move or the other.

“Take time to establish your brand, be known for something. No one taught us about strategizing for nominations so am sharing what I have learnt. We are always taught how to win in elections,” she says.

“But when we vie and lose, we are left stranded and feeling lost. There is an alternative, nomination. Men have long benefitted from nominations and so should we,” she adds.

**Nominations for sale**

But she warns that there are nominations for sale which can be bought by individuals who have never been in the party for long, bypassing more loyal and serious candidates.

She also warns that some leaders, if not watched, can turn one into their ‘house girl’ just because they gave you a nomination.

“This is not leadership. Nominations are there for a reason and women should refuse to be abused in the name of nominations.”

She encourages women to identify themselves with a group, be it youth or women groups and build a loyal following for themselves.

“When you bring something substantial to the table you will be taken seriously,” she says. This is what she has done.

Abdi says that though there are more women in North Eastern serving in active politics, there are no enough young women in this space.

“I have not vied yet but I managed to work hard for a nomination to build my brand and use it as a launching pad when I vie in 2017 as an MCA. This is my strategy and women should have such strategies,” she observes.

“Women get easily discouraged when they think of the resources they need. But they need to find other cheaper ways to brand themselves. Many people know me now,” she adds.

One of her major successes is helping women to come together and grow various grassroots economic empowerment groups.

“When mothers have something to make money out of, their daughters will not undergo the Female Genital Mutilation, they will therefore not drop out of school to marry and bear children,” she explains.

**Value of Education**

Abdi appreciates the value of education, saying she is grateful to her family for the opportunity to pursue her dreams, which she says is rare in her culture.

As she sets her sight on sustaining her influence in politics, she is happy that more young Muslim women are now fighting it out for a share of the national cake. This is just the beginning for greater things to come.
Transforming Leadership, Changing lives

The value women bring to leadership and governance